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SPECIAL ISSUE

JANUARY 16, 2023 ₹100

INDIA TODAY

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

INSPIRATIONAL, HEARTWARMING AND EMOTIVE INSIGHTS FROM SEERS, CELEBRITIES AND DO-GOODERS ON THE MANY PATHS TO BLISS AND HOW TO FIND THEM

DL (DS)-03/MP/2022-23-24; RNI NO. 28587/75 REGISTERED NO. DL(ND)-11/6068/2021-22-2023; LICENSED TO POST WPP NO. U(C)-88/2021-23; FARIDABAD/05/2023-25

Volume 48-Number 3; Published on every Friday of Advance Week; Posted at LPC Delhi – RMS – Delhi – 110006 on Every Friday & Saturday; Total number of Pages 84 (including cover pages)

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INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

GURUSPEAK

GURU MANTRAS

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By Kaushik Deka

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By Rohit Parihar

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Eknath Shinde's challenges in 2023: Play assertive CM, keep his flock united

By Dhaval Kulkarni

CM Shinde may be leading the government in Maharashtra, but it's his deputy Devendra Fadnavis who is perceived to be at the wheel https://bit.ly/3Gj8ooF

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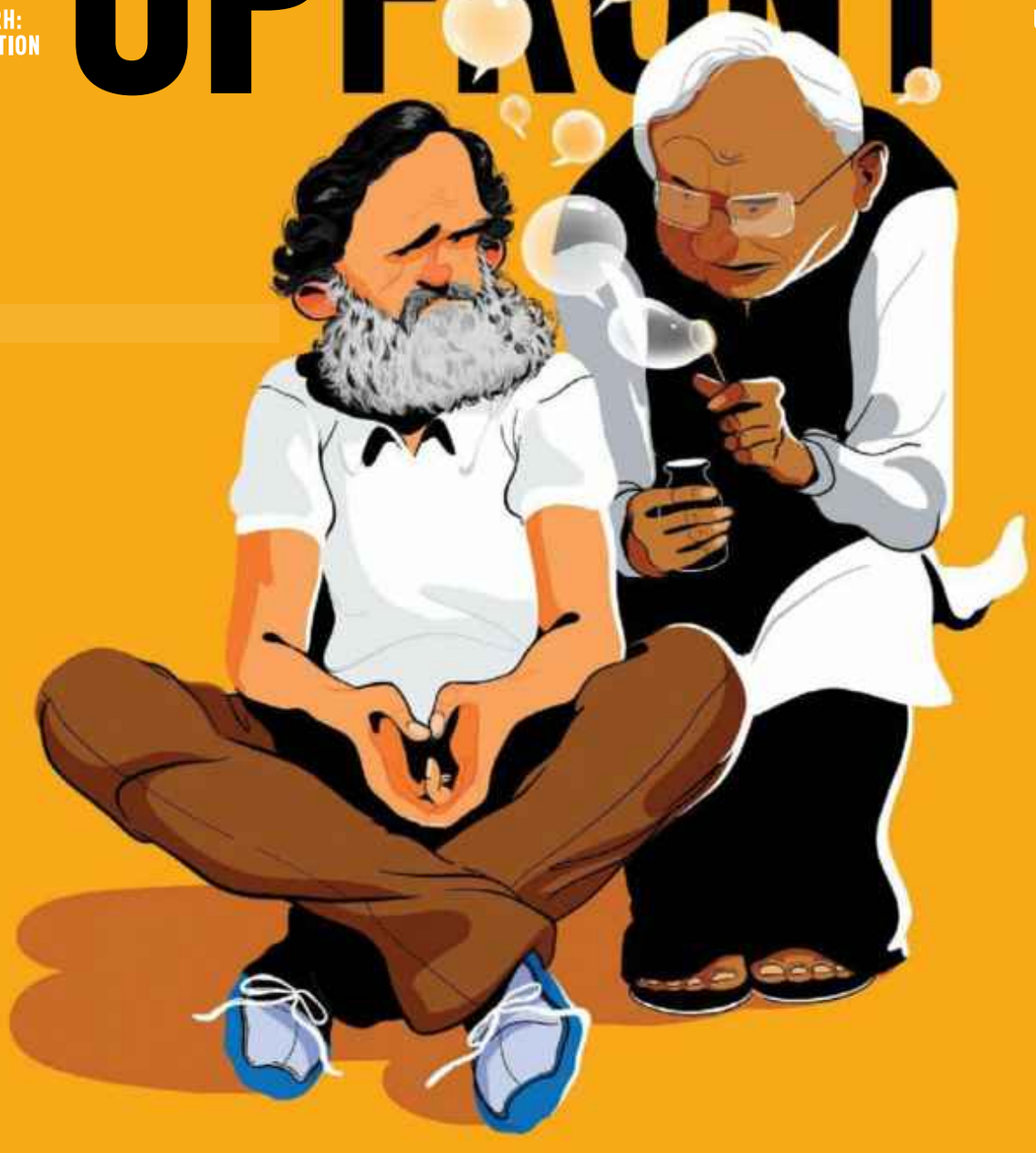

OPPOSITION UNITY

CONGRESS 'YUKT' BHARAT

By Amitabh Srivastava

The last day of 2022 seemed the perfect occasion for Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar to make another pivot, one that can potentially inflect the course of Indian politics. When the media in Patna sought his response to former Madhya Pradesh CM Kamal Nath's advocacy of Rahul Gandhi as the Opposition's prime ministerial face in 2024, he issued a sidelong endorsement: "*Thike hai, usme kya burai hai?*" (It's fine, where's the objection?). "After all," he added, "they have to pick the candidate." Nitish may not have the casting vote on the issue, but his word does have carry—and shifts the weight of perceptions at a time when Rahul's Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY has been receiving only sporadically enthusiastic responses from the Opposition. For all the Congress's joy at having rediscovered its mojo, with endless visuals of waving crowds lining the roads and social media rapture, the hard-core political spectrum has been at best ambivalent till now.

A tone of formality rather than outright cordiality had marked the responses of both big leaders of Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party's Mayawati, as Rahul's yatra wended its way into the state in the new year. In Akhilesh's case, even that came after a bit of heated verbal jousting between the two leaders. Beyond the north, at least two Opposition CMs—West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee and Telangana's K. Chandrashekar Rao—appear unwilling to accept Congress primacy. Delhi's Arvind Kejriwal, of course, is a natural rival. It is in this space that Nitish's intervention can play a role, since he has an access to all sides here.

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

A FORMAL DISTANCE
Akhilesh Yadav has been ambivalent towards Congress overtures

Since August 9, 2022, when Nitish dumped the BJP and linked up with the RJD, Congress and four other parties to form a new government in Bihar, he has been pitching for a broad-based Opposition unity, with the Grand Old Party taking its old central role: a 'Congress-yukt' model. "Nitish's idea of Opposition unity always accorded centrality to the Congress," says a top JD(U) leader, recalling how it was Rahul that the Bihar CM had chosen to meet as the first prominent Opposition leader within weeks of going over to the anti-BJP side. That September 5 meeting—and the subsequent one on September 25, where he and RJD patriarch Lalu Yadav met Sonia Gandhi—amounted to not only a bilateral overture, but a message to others, he adds. But this endorsement is not without an expectation of a matching initiative from the Congress. He wants its leadership to take the lead in nudging other parties onto one platform—something he has been urging since those meetings. The two Bihar leaders had asked Sonia to take an initiative, as the old UPA chairperson. She had promised to do so, but is yet to make any discernible move, and the GOP seemed to get caught up in Rahul's yatra, which kicked off on September 7. That left a vacuum in the space for unity-making, till it came about almost as an afterthought before the BJY's UP leg.

Nitish has from the outset said he is neither willing nor inclined to aspire to the PM's job, but since he's lending his stature and experience to the process of Opposition unity, he expects the Congress to add some formality to the task. In his mind, it is already taking on a shape. "The Congress may consider reviving the now-defunct UPA. Nitish can be given the responsibility of convenor—a role George Fernandes once played for the NDA—to give him the locus to reach out to other regional chieftains," says the party leader.

Another JD(U) leader explains why Nitish wants the Congress to get serious on the war preparations. "The BJP, at its peak in 2019, won only 303 seats. Contrary to the perception it exudes of being a pan-India behemoth, as much as 87 per cent of those seats—262 out of 303—came from just 12 states, including Bihar. Poll statistics make it clear it's just a top-heavy party overwhelmingly dependent on these 12 states. If we shake them there, they will be shaken for good," he says. And the Congress, with or without allies, is in direct contest with the BJP in nine out of these 12: Karnataka (BJP: 25 seats), Madhya Pradesh (28), Rajasthan (24), Chhattisgarh (9), Assam (9), Bihar (17), Gujarat (26), Haryana (10), Maharashtra (23), UP (62), Bengal (18) and Jharkhand (11). "In the first four, the Congress is a genuine match, and to a degree in Haryana, while it's a formidable adversary with allies in Maharashtra and Jharkhand," says the leader. "The fact is, the BJP's 2019 peak was about 38 per cent votes. Flip the detail: it means 62 per cent voted against the BJP. A part of our idea is to consolidate these votes."

NITISH'S IDEA OF OPPOSITION UNITY ALWAYS ACCORDED CENTRALITY TO THE CONGRESS

Unlike leaders like Kejriwal who may prefer to wait and grow bigger to become the Opposition's face at a later stage, instead of backing the Congress in 2024, Nitish seems to have his eyes set on the here and now. Having already declared Tejashwi Yadav as the leader of the Bihar grand alliance for the 2025 assembly polls, he doesn't wish to settle for any half-hearted measures for 2024. He had kickstarted his outreach as soon as he formed the new government in Bihar—having met, besides Rahul and Sonia, also Kejriwal, ex-Karnataka CM H.D. Kumaraswamy, Left leaders Sitaram Yechury and D. Raja, NCP boss Sharad Pawar, Akhilesh and INLD boss Omprakash Chautala. Besides, KCR visited Patna to meet him. But if September raised some hopes of an Opposition alliance forming, the next three have elapsed without much progress.

Sources close to Nitish say he expected the Congress to make a move at least after Mallikarjun Kharge took over in October. Having kept his patience for two months, he voiced his disappointment at least twice last month. It was conspicuous when he said on December 11: "*Mera batwa maanenge to ee haar jaayenge, mera baat log nahin maanenge to hum kya karenge, humko kya hai* (If they listen to me, the BJP will lose. If they don't, what can I do…I have no stakes)." Again, on December 25, when reporters quizzed him about Rahul's yatra, his response was a laconic "I don't know." A week later, his Rahul endorsement—the most decisive by any Opposition chief minister—seems like a magnanimous ultimatum. ■

MAHARASHTRA

All Is Not Well Between Shinde And Fadnavis

By Dhaval Kulkarni

For legislators of the ruling Balasahebanchi Shiv Sena (BSS)-BJP coalition in Maharashtra, every day might bring reminders of that famous dialogue—"*taarikh pe taarikh*" (one date after the other)—from the 1990s potboiler *Damini*. That's because these MLAs, in contention for ministerial berths in the proposed expansion of the Eknath Shinde government, are being regularly given fresh deadlines for this exercise. The new ministers were to be inducted before the winter session of the assembly at Nagpur, but this deadline too was missed. More to the point, it seems just a surface symptom: insiders say the delay points to simmering tensions between the allies on power-sharing and division of portfolios, with internal restiveness within each constituent adding to the unstable mix.

One sign of trouble within the ruling coalition: corruption allegations against CM Shinde and ministers from his camp during the winter session. Tellingly, the key question being raised was whether it was an inside job. Senior BJP leaders are adding a spritz of fuel to the simmering coal, not exactly being covert about their continuing unhappiness at the party letting Shinde walk off with the CM's chair. Moreover, it was only on August 9—40 days after Shinde and Fadnavis took oath on June 30—that the cabinet was expanded with 18 ministers, nine each from BSS and BJP. The state cabinet can have 43 members, including the chief minister. The second

MAGAZINE KING

WHOSE MOVE? CM Eknath Shinde with deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis

GETTY IMAGES

round of expansion was to take place soon after, but has been getting stuck in what seems like perennial deferment.

The key issue is how to parcel out the meat and gravy. Shinde has spoken about his faction getting an equal number of ministers, which the BJP leaders resent. As the bigger party, the BJP wants a larger share of the pie. Incidentally, after the 2019 election, it was Uddhav's insistence that the Shiv Sena get an equal share in power, including the CM's post, that was the tipping point in the party's ties with the BJP. Sources admit Shinde may have a tough task keeping his flock together if he cannot place them in positions of power. Despite laying claim to being the "real" Shiv Sena, Shinde's group is more of a loose federation of leaders than a political party. Already, legislators like Sanjay Shirsat, a three-term MLA from Aurangabad, and independent MLA Omprakash (Bacchu) Kadu, who was a minister in the MVA government, have made their displeasure evident.

In what has churned the waters further, Shinde and four ministers—Abdul Sattar (agriculture), Shambhuraj Desai (state excise), Uday Samant (industries) and Sanjay Rathod (Food and Drugs Administration or FDA)—have been charged by the Opposition with irregularities in allotment of government lands, undue favours to corporate and such like. Desai and Sattar are seen as among Shinde's closest aides in the cabinet and were among the first batch of Sena MLAs who joined his midnight coup. The spiciest bit: there's speculation if some ammunition against Shinde's men was leaked to the Opposition by the BJP. Says a Congress leader: "The fact that allegations were levelled only against Shinde's ministers and not against those from the BJP says a lot." Uddhav, too, made it explicit on Thursday, saying: "The ministers from their (Shinde) camp must think—how and why are these cases coming out? They must investigate this."

Adding grist to the mill, state BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bavankule says he would like to see Fadnavis back as CM. (The BJP has 112 MLAs; the BBS, even with allied independents and smaller parties, only touches 50.) There are more straws in the wind. BJP leader Chitra Wagh took open umbrage at the induction of Rathod, who had quit as the MVA forest minister in February 2021 after the suicide of a 22-year-old TikTok star. In September, Sattar was reportedly reprimanded by Fadnavis

THE CHARGES

EKNATH SHINDE
Chief Minister

Charged with ordering the Nagpur Improvement Trust (NIT) to allocate 4.5 acres land meant for the urban poor, worth Rs 83 crore, for the "throw-away" price of just Rs 2 crore to 16 persons in Nagpur in 2021, while he was the MVA's urban development minister

ABDUL SATTAR
Agriculture Minister

Charged with allocating 37 acres of gairan (pasture) land in Washim to a private party despite SC and state government orders against such allotments

UDAY SAMANT
Industries Minister

Alleged to have given undue favours and incentives to a liquor manufacturer by notifying its investments as a mega project, going against norms

SANJAY RATHOD
FDA Minister

Accused of illegally allotting 10 acres of gairan land worth ₹10 crore in Washim as MoS revenue during the 2014-19 BJP-Sena regime, despite the district collector ordering action against the allottees for submitting fake documents

SHAMBHURAJ DESAI
Excise Minister

Charged with illegaly constructing a house in an eco-sensitive zone at Navli village in Mahabaleshwar

UDDHAV ASKED IT POINT-BLANK: "THE SHINDE CAMP MUST THINK...HOW AND WHY ARE THESE CASES COMING OUT?"

MAGAZINE KING

in a cabinet meeting for speaking out of turn. Another stress-mark: postings given to some senior police officers during large-scale transfers in October-November were either stayed or amended. (Fadnavis holds the home portfolio.)

The Congress leader claims Fadnavis is "sulking" at being forced to play second fiddle to Shinde, who was a minister under him in 2014-19. "He may be trying to show Shinde can't run the state efficiently." Senior journalist Sandeep Pradhan recalls a spate of leaks during Fadnavis's tenure as CM against BJP ministers seen to be on his wrong side: Eknath Khadse, Vinod Tawde, Pankaja Munde, Chandrakant Patil and Prakash Mehta.

On the expansion, Shinde also risks facing dissent from those left out. A BJP leader seconds that. "Shinde is facing a problem of plenty. There are too many contenders with nuisance value in his camp. They may not settle for positions in state-run corporations... the BJP may have to concede some more ground to Shinde," he says. And as a senior BJP MLA admits, restiveness is not unique to the Shinde camp. "Some powerful Congress-NCP leaders joined the BJP for better prospects. They want to be ministers. Old-timers here are feeling overlooked." ■

ASSAM/ DELIMITATION

SHIFTING THE LINES

By Kaushik Deka

From the very first day of 2023, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has initiated the delimitation of assembly and parliamentary constituencies in Assam. The exercise, as mandated by Article 170 of the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950, redraws boundaries of legislative constituencies to reflect changes in population. It also reworks the number of seats reserved for scheduled castes and tribes, as provisioned by Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution. The objective is to provide fair representation to all.

While Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has claimed that the delimitation process would "safeguard Assam's future", Opposition parties have questioned the timing and intent of the exercise. Some have even dubbed it as a conspiracy to deny Muslims their political rights, as the ECI will use 2001 Census data for delimitation, though 2011 Census data is available. The Muslim population in Assam grew from 29 per cent in 2001 to 34 per cent in 2011. Government sources say that the current delimitation is being done under the Delimitation Act of 2002, which mandates 2001 Census data as the base for constituency demarcation.

As per the Constitution, delimitation should be conducted after every Census to account for demographic changes. It mandates that the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to a state should be such that the ratio between that number and the state's population is, as far as practical, the same for all states. Accordingly, there have been four previous delimitations, the last being in 1976 (based on 1971 Census).

However, delimitation based on population meant that states with no population control could end up with a greater number of seats in Parliament. To allay the fear of unequal political representation expressed by developed states, the Constitution was amended in 1976 to suspend delimitation until 2001. Another amendment in 2001 postponed this till 2026. However, in 2002, a new Delimitation Act was passed to redraw the existing number of parliamentary/ assembly constituencies on the basis of the 2001 Census. But the

MANASH DAS

CENTRE OF DEVOTION
Holi celebrations in the Barpeta Satra in Barpeta district, Assam

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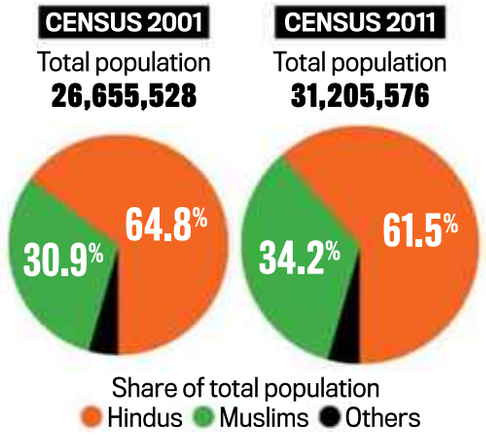
LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION IN ASSAM

LOK SABHA
Total number of seats: **14**
Reserved seats for SC & ST: **3**
Muslim Lok Sabha MPs: **2**

ASSEMBLY
Total number of seats: **126**
Reserved seats for SC & ST: **24**
Muslim MLAs: **32**



use of the 2001 Census was challenged in Gauhati High Court on the ground that its data was riddled with discrepancies. The Centre also feared law and order issues in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland and the Delimitation Act of 2002 was amended on January 14, 2008, to empower the president to postpone the exercise in these four states. On February 28, 2020, then president Ram Nath Kovind rescinded the 2008 deferment order, thereby clearing the decks for delimitation in these four states.

Delimitation is conducted by a delimitation commission, comprising a former judge of the Supreme Court as chairperson, chief election commissioner or another election commissioner nominated by the CEC and state election commissioner of the concerned state. In 2008, Parliament decided that instead of creating another delimitation commission, the ECI would conduct the exercise in the four states. The RPA was amended, and Section 8A introduced, to give the ECI's new assignment legal validity. Earlier, the ECI was charged with redrawing the boundaries of constituencies in Delhi (1992) and Uttarakhand (2000). While the decisions of the delimitation commission cannot be challenged in court, the decisions of the ECI will be subject to legal scrutiny.

As per norms, existing boundaries, facility of communication and public convenience are considered while determining constituencies' boundaries in delimitation and as far as practicable, all assembly constituencies in a district are confined within its territorial limits.

In an intriguing decision, just a day before the ban came into force from January 1, the Assam cabinet decided to re-merge four newly-created districts—Tamulpur, Hojai, Biswanath and Bajali—with the districts they were carved out from and redraw boundaries in 14 other places. Opposition parties see in this a manipulation by the Sarma-led BJP government in order to benefit Hindu voters. Sarma claimed that this "harsh decision was taken" for the "betterment" of the state as "district boundary plays a key role" in delimitation.

ASSAM'S RE-MERGER OF FOUR DISTRICTS, SAY OPPOSITION CRITICS, IS A MOVE THAT WILL BENEFIT HINDU VOTERS

The indigenous Assamese waits for a "larger gain" through this re-merger. There is a widespread perception that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, mostly Bangla-speaking Muslims, have changed the demography of Assam, making them deciding factors in 35 of the 126 assembly seats and six of the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies. The National Register of Citizenship (NRC), updated for Assam in 2019, found 1.9 million people ineligible for citizenship, but this draft has now been rejected by all stakeholders, including the BJP. People now see delimitation as a way to deny suspected immigrants the opportunity to swing election results. Indeed, Sarma has said, "We were not successful with the NRC...delimitation is the last resort to use the demographic change in Assam and in the assembly to the advantage of Assamese people." Earlier in 2021, in the run-up to the assembly polls, he was more categorical: "Delimitation is a must so that 110 seats are for indigenous people."

Of the 32 Muslim MLAs in Assam, eight come from Barpeta and Nagaon. The creation of Bajali and Hojai respectively out of these districts would have further increased this number, suspect many. Both districts have immense social, emotional and religious significance, as they are home to the two biggest monasteries set up by Srimanta Shankardev and Mahapurush Madhabdev, the socio-cultural father figures of the Assamese people. Both districts, earlier Hindu-dominated, have seen massive demographic changes, primarily because of an influx since 1971.
In fact, many critics suspect that the decision to stick to the 2001 Census was taken because several reserved constituencies are likely to lose their status, since 2011 Census data shows Muslims now dominate these seats. Assam recorded the highest growth in Muslim population in India between 2001 and 2011.

Irrespective of the BJP's assertions and fears of the Opposition, delimitation is unlikely to result in a massive readjustment of seats. This has indirectly been acknowledged by the CM himself when he said that there should be a debate on why only population is considered as the basis of delimitation. That's perhaps a preparation for an escape route if there is a gap between the actual results after delimitation and the promises made. ■

MAGAZINE KING

KARNATAKA

A New Quota Calculus

By Ajay Sukumaran

The clamour among Other Backward Class (OBC) groups in Karnataka for a larger slice of reservations for education and employment ran into a novel twist in the last week of December. Wary of upsetting two of the dominant castes in the state—Lingayats and Vokkaligas—especially with a state election to face in about four months, the Basavaraj Bommai government moved quickly to acquiesce to their demands for a higher share of reservation quota. However, it professed to do this by carrying out a reshuffle of the existing OBC reservation categories—a surprise move that has thrown up more questions than answers.

The plethora of reservation demands from various communities has been a Pandora's Box that Karnataka's ruling BJP has been cautious about. But it opened one up in October by issuing an ordinance to increase the reservation for scheduled castes and tribes from the existing 18 per cent to 24 per cent. This was based on a report by a committee set up by the previous government in 2019 to examine a long-pending demand to raise SC/ST reservations given that they now covered over 150 castes and that their component populations had increased anyway. However, this additional 6 per cent took Karnataka's total reservation (including the 32 per cent set aside for OBCs) beyond the Supreme Court's 50 per cent limit, which it was already at.

Hence, while the BJP was eyeing the goodwill from Dalit sections with this move, the OBC communities only intensified their demands for a similar quota hike. On December 22, amid the Karnataka legislature's winter session, the Panchamashali subset of the Lingayat community took out a massive rally led by their seer Basava Jaya Mruthyunjaya Swamiji and legislators from both the ruling BJP and opposition Congress, giving the government an ultimatum on this count. The Lingayats are the state's largest caste group and a mainstay of the BJP's support base. However, the Vokkaliga community, the state's second-biggest caste group, also put forth the threat of an agitation.

Karnataka's 32 per cent reservation for OBCs is spread across five categories—graded from the most backward to relatively backward—and each with varying quotas. While the Lingayats as a group currently come under Category III(b), a slab eligible for a 5 per cent reservation, the Panchamashalis have been agitating to be moved up to Category II(a), which has a 15 per cent reservation.

POLL-ITICKING! Chief minister Basavaraj Bommai

ANI

MAGAZINE KING

They weren't alone in seeking such a re-classification. Other OBC communities in Category II(a), such as the Kuruba and Vishwakarma, want to be included in the ST list while the Ediga community has for years been seeking a shift to Category I. Leaders of the Vokkaliga community—which is currently in Category III(a) with 4 per cent reservation—have threatened a stir from January 23 if their demand for a hike to 12 per cent isn't met.

On December 29, the Bommai cabinet, citing an interim report of the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission, approved a rejig of the OBC categories in a bid to accommodate both the Vokkaliga and Panchamashali demands. It did away with their existing categories [III(a) and III(b) respectively] and instead created two new categories—II(c) and II(d)—but kept their reservation quotas intact. The rationale for the move, as law minister J.C. Madhuswamy explained it, is that these new categories will also have accrued to them whatever is bound to remain from the separate 10 per cent quota for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). "In principle, we have decided to distribute what is left over from the EWS reservation quota to II (c) and II (d) for educational and employment purposes. We will finalise it when the data is available," he told the media on December 29.

BOMMAI IS SEEKING TO ACCOMMODATE DEMANDS FOR A HIGHER QUOTA FROM ONE SET OF LINGAYATS AS ALSO VOKKALIGAS VIA THE SURPLUS FROM EWS

"There is no clarity yet, so we are unable to react immediately," says C.N. Balakrishna, president of the Vokkaligara Sangha and a Janata Dal (Secular) MLA from Shravanabelagola.

KERALA/ CPI(M)

CLEANING HOUSE OR A PURGE?

MAGAZINE KING

By Jeemon Jacob

ANI

It all started at the CPI(M) state committee meeting on December 22 that unanimously passed a 'rectification charter' aimed at weeding out "undesirable characteristics" and elements within the party. The document, with a typically stone-faced title ('Contemporary politics and the party's immediate responsibilities in the organisational sector'), charts out a plan to, ostensibly, improve the quality of leaders and cadre. Explaining to the media, CPI(M) state secretary M.V. Govindan Master said, "Corrective steps will be taken and no one will be exempt. From the state secretariat to the lowest unit of branch members, all party workers will be subject to an elaborate process of self-criticism and scrutiny."

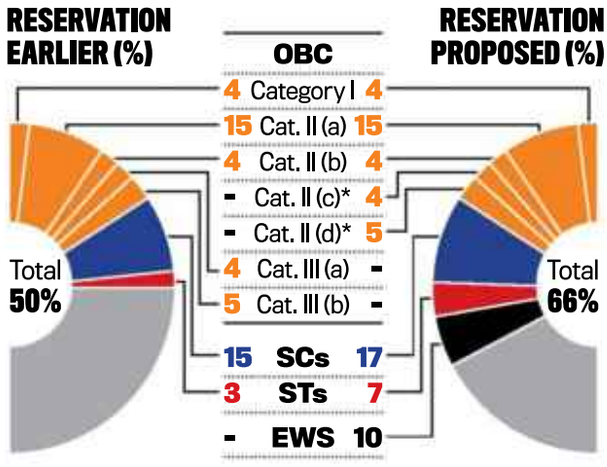
Those terse lines speak of a degree of inner tumult the party does not usually admit to. If sources are to be believed, a purge cannot be ruled out. The 69-year-old Govindan Master had replaced the deceased Kodiyeri Balakrishnan as state secretary in September 2022 and is known as a strict disciplinarian. The state committee meeting had witnessed dramatic moments after senior leader and current Khadi Board vice-chair-

The Sangha, which has been pressing for an overall hike in reservation and for the inclusion of urban Vokkaligas under the EWS quota, says the community leaders have called for a detailed consultation on the matter.

C.S. Dwarakanath, a former Karnataka Backward Classes Commission chairman and a Congress spokesman, however, says the two new categories are just an eyewash and designed to fail in their current form. "The EWS cannot be applicable to communities already in the list of backward classes or SC/STs. If they want to give reservation under EWS, they have to remove them from the backward classes list," he reasons. Agrees Ashok Haranahalli, a former advocate general and president of the Akhila Karnataka Brahmana Mahasabha. "The question of now giving a portion remaining from the EWS category is nonsensical," he says.

Currently, both the Panchamashali and Vokkaliga leaders are awaiting the fine print. And the government says the exact quantum of quota hikes will be clear when the backward classes commission submits its final report in two-three months. ■

NEW SLICES ON THE QUOTA PIE



*Plus remainder from EWS quota

SMELTING? Rectification aside, Pinarayi can't drop the ball

GAZING KING

man P. Jayarajan raised charges of financial irregularities and land-grabbing against his near-namesake and state Left Democratic Front convenor E.P. Jayarajan (EP). The charges include allegations that the CPI(M) central committee member and his family members have a majority stake in a Rs 30 crore Ayurveda resort, 'Vaidekam', in Morazha village in Kannur district. Incidentally, Morazha is the native village of Govindan Master and he has asked P. Jayarajan to submit a written complaint if he is bent on pursuing the charges against EP.

There are three Jayarajans who are considered party strongmen from Kannur. EP is the most flamboyant and gaffe-prone, P. Jayarajan is the most popular among the cadre (even after he has been sidelined), and then there is M.V. Jayarajan, the current CPI(M) Kannur district secretary. The three leaders have for long helped the Marxist party keep a vice-like hold on the violence-prone district, of course with the blessings of the other big Kannur natives, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his late No. 2 Kodiyeri.

ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION AGAINST A SENIOR CPI(M) LEADER, AND SO SOON AFTER A NEW DISPENSATION TOOK OVER, HAVE STUMPED THE PARTY CADRE

"P. Jayarajan's allegations against EP are not new really. It was raised earlier too when Kodiyeri was party secretary. But no probe was ordered considering his seniority," says a senior party leader who obviously did not want to be named. "EP wanted to become state secretary after Kodiyeri's death but was passed over in favour of Govindan Master who has also become a politburo member now. EP has been sulking since then, and has gone on leave pleading ill health. His 'resistance' to the regime change is considered a challenge to Govindan Master. P. Jayarajan's allegations, and that too at a public forum like the state committee, were scripted to hit back at EP."

The discussions in the state committee were soon leaked to the local media, which started off the

fireworks, with TV news channels devoting prime time to the "crisis in the CPI(M)". The old nepotism debates, flashy lifestyles and shady dealings of a number of comrades were once again dissected. EP's cohorts have not been sitting idle either, hitting back with selective leaks about P. Jayarajan's alleged links to the gold smuggling racket and "goonda gangs" in Kannur.

The state opposition has been gleefully watching Pinarayi and company squirm in the media glare, though many of the leaders have refused to join issue saying it is an "internal matter of the party". The recently concluded CPI(M) politburo meeting also did not discuss the matter, but sources say the central committee directed its state counterpart to "initiate appropriate steps". EP, who had been MIA politically for the past three months, finally surfaced before the state secretariat on December 30 to offer an explanation. He apparently told the committee that he had no stake in the ayurveda resort although his family has invested Rs 93 lakh in it. He claims that wife Indira, who retired as general manager of Kannur District Cooperative Bank, and his son Jaison, an NRI, have invested in the project with their earnings.

Pinarayi has now called for a truce and directed all those involved to settle the issue without further damaging the party's image. He knows he can't afford a divide in the party ranks in home base Kannur, especially when he commands the only CPI(M)-led government in the country. C.P. John, state secretary of the Communist Marxist Party (CMP), a breakaway faction of the CPI(M), is scathing about his old party's plans for "rectification". "How can the state CPI(M) do any such thing when the party is a repository of goons and smugglers? The corrupt can never be true communists. The Kerala unit will end up going the Bengal way," he says. ■

SOMETHING FOR THEM People at a rally in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, in 2018. The state government has hiked quota to 76 per cent in jobs and educational institutions in December

MAGAZINE KING

CHHATTISGARH

THE RESERVATIO

By Rahul Noronha

Chhattisgarh's complex caste equations are at the centre of a pitched political battle between the BJP and Congress in the run-up to the 2023 assembly polls. The core issue: enhanced reservation for marginalised groups in government jobs and admission to educational institutions. The Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government has upped the ante by proposing a massive 76 per cent reservation; the BJP has termed it an eyewash. Moreover, Governor Anusuiya Uikey is yet to give her assent to it. Increased reservation might yield dividends in the assembly polls, but there is a catch—more reservation percentages for some groups come at the cost of certain others, thereby complicating matters. The issue also has a bearing on the pro-OBC push both the Congress and the BJP have been pursuing for a couple of years.

Like its parent state Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh had adopted 50 per cent reservation in government jobs and educational institutions, with Scheduled Tribes (STs) getting 20 per cent, Scheduled Castes (SCs) 16 per cent and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) 14 per cent. In 2012, the Raman Singh-led BJP government hiked reservation to 58 per cent, increasing quota for STs to 32 per cent, reducing that for SCs from 16 to 12 per cent and retaining OBC quota at 14 per cent. The main gainers, thus, were the STs. That government claimed this was done on the basis of the 2011 Census that pegged the ST population of Chhattisgarh at around the

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same percentage. The decision was challenged at the HC through a bunch of petitions, mostly filed by the Satnami community—the most prominent and politically powerful SC community in the state. The HC clubbed all the petitions and, in an order passed in September 2022, quashed the 58 per cent reservation, stating that quota exceeding the 50 per cent ceiling set by the Supreme Court was unconstitutional. In 2019, too, the HC had struck down an increased quota plan—it added up to 82 per cent—announced by the then new Congress government, citing a lack of quantifiable population data.

The September order triggered massive protests by tribal groups, who petitioned the state government for help. A blame game began—the BJP accused the Congress government of failing to put up a good legal defence, while the Congress said the previous BJP government had a weak law. However, the Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government came out with a robust response. It challenged the HC order at the SC and called a special session of the assembly on December 1 and 2. On the second day, it passed two bills, hiking reservation to 76 per cent. In doing so, it restored the quota for tribes at 32 per cent, marginally increased it for SCs to 13 per cent and hiked reservation for OBCs to 27 per cent. It also added a four per cent quota for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). The immediate opposition came from general category groups, who took out candle-light marches in some towns. "Normally, reservation is 50 per cent, but Chhattisgarh has 44 per cent forest cover and its economic and social situation is different, warranting the 76 per cent reservation," said CM Baghel, defending the move.

As the reservation amendment bills reached the Raj Bhavan, it hit a block. Governor Uikey has asked the state government 10 questions pertaining to the basis for enhanced reservation. The obvious ones were whether a commission, as mandated by courts, was set up to collect quantifiable data to justify exceeding the 50 per cent quota cap, and if legal opinion from the state's law department was taken on the matter.

"Why did the state government take two months to call a special session of the assembly? And if it was to amend the Act, why did it also appeal in the Supreme Court?" asks BJP MLA Saurabh Singh Sisodia, claiming it was all a show. On the other hand, the Congress is keen to use Uikey's perceived stalling—she is a former politician and BJP member—against its adversary. "What the governor is doing is delaying tactics. The governor has no right to amend even one word. What she should have done is to return the bills with queries," says state Congress spokesperson Sushil Anand Shukla.

IF THE QUANTIFIABLE DATA REPORT SHOWS A FALL IN OBC NUMBERS, IT CAN AFFECT BOTH BJP AND CONGRESS, WHO BANK ON OBCs

While most reserved communities are satisfied with the new bills, given their share in the reservation pie has increased, the SCs are upset with the token one per cent hike, which is still lower than what they had till 2012. On December 18, on the occasion of Ghasidas Jayanti—commemorating Guru Ghasidas, founder of the Satnami community—members protested against the new quota. Most of the SC population is concentrated in the central region of Chhattisgarh, which has the largest share of assembly seats.

Earlier, the Chhattisgarh government had indeed appointed a single-member quantifiable data commission, headed by Justice C.L. Patel, which had submitted its report to the cabinet on November 26. According to sources, the commission's findings indicate that OBC numbers are not as high as claimed. The report, if made public, could impact both the BJP and the Congress, which have been focusing on OBC communities prior to the polls. The BJP has recently appointed Arun Saw, a member of the Sahu OBC community, as state BJP president and Narayan Chandel, also an OBC, as leader of Opposition. CM Baghel continues to be the OBC face of the Congress. The perceived reduction in the share of OBCs in the population means that non-reserved communities, including Brahmins, Thakurs, Kayasthas, Vaishyas, Sikhs, some Christians and some Muslims comprise more than the five per cent claimed by OBC leaders, and are probably in the 15-17 per cent range. It would strengthen the hands of leaders from the general categories in both parties. ■

MAGAZINE KING

ROHIT JAIN PARAS

THE TEMPEST
(From second left) State unit chief Poonia, BJP president Nadda and Raje

RAJASTHAN/ BJP

AN OPPOSITION IN DISARRAY

MAGAZINE KING

By Rohit Parihar

On January 2, the Rajasthan BJP unit held one of its continuing Jan Aakrosh rallies in Jodhpur against the "misgovernance" of the Ashok Gehlot-led Congress government, but much like the response in many other parts of the state, the turnout was poor. This despite the presence of Union ministers Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Gen. (retd) V.K. Singh. Matters, it seems, had not improved since December 1 when BJP national president J.P. Nadda was confronted with a similar situation at the launch of the Jan Aakrosh Yatra.

The state BJP's woes have continued with the bypoll loss in Sardarshahar assembly seat in Churu, with the party losing by nearly 27,000 votes. With this, the BJP has lost six of the last seven bypolls held in the state (including two seats it held). It sent a clear message—Gehlot's Congress may be facing all-round derision in the state and beyond for its endless factionalism, but the BJP is even more in disarray ahead of the assembly election due in December 2023.

The BJP brass is possibly aware of the ground reality, hence the two-week, statewide Jan Aakrosh Yatra with local BJP leaders travelling in 52 vehicles to interact with the masses.

Former CM Vasundhara Raje, still the tallest BJP leader in the state, had been mostly sidelined in this effort, except during the launch rally. The drubbing in Sardarshahar came as a dampener for the anti-Raje lobby—it was hoping for a popular endorsement of the central BJP's line of ignoring her heft in the state. The loss in Himachal the same day—which Prime Minister Narendra Modi attributed to a "1 per cent margin"—lifted no spirits either. As everyone recalled gloomily, the BJP had lost 2018 in Rajasthan by a similar margin. Other party insiders are also pointing to why regional satraps are essential to fight polls in states such as Rajasthan where the Congress has a strong organisational base, and wafer-thin swings can make or mar fortunes.

GOING WITH RAJE AS CM CANDIDATE MAY BE THE ONLY VIABLE OPTION FOR THE BJP, GOING BY ITS RECENT DISAPPOINTMENTS

State BJP chief Satish Poonia, organisational general secretary Chandrashekhar and deputy leader of the opposition Rajendra Rathore were given a free hand but have so far failed to deliver. Rathore has been the main strategist in most of the bypolls while Poonia, a Jat, has failed to lasso in even his caste cohort. He claims the Jan Aakrosh rallies have so far collected 1.4 million complaints and touched base with 20 times the number of people. But ground reports suggest most of these interactions ended inconclusively. The leaders have tried to use issues like

the recruitment exam paper leaks, law and order breakdown and failure to waive all farm loans to build up the tempo against the Gehlot government. Poonia must be wary: this could be his last chance to convince the high command and get himself a second term as state chief (his stint ended last month) and lead the party into the election.

Poonia's ineffectiveness was almost exposed when ex-BJP MLA Prahlad Gunjal announced a parallel rally in Kota on December 24, a day after the party's Jan Aakrosh rally there. At the last moment, the Gunjal-organised rally—which Raje was to address—was cancelled citing Covid threats, but party insiders say it would have overshadowed the official show.

There are a few reasons for the BJP's declining popularity in Rajasthan. In blaming Raje for the loss in 2018, the BJP high command overlooked certain crucial factors that it may be analysing now, after the recent defeats. Raje's government had lost the election by a margin of just over one per cent in vote share and, of course, like Himachal, the state has a history of electing new parties every five years. Besides, Rajasthan did not get any special assistance or project from the Centre during Raje's term that could have been projected to voters as a "double engine" advantage. That said, Raje and her government were guilty of underperforming.

Given the dull response to the Jan Aakrosh rallies, the buzz is the high command might go for an overhaul and induct a low-profile RSS favourite who is not too ambitious (a pre-poll formula used elsewhere in the north) to lead the campaign. Right now, there are a half-dozen leaders who are hoping to replace Raje as CM candidate if the party wins. They are out to cut each other down even as they know the BJP needs Raje to mobilise the masses. Unless the Modi-Shah duo are willing to risk losing Rajasthan just to show her up, the party has little choice but to let her lead another yatra like the ones she did in 2003 and 2013 to bring down earlier Gehlot-led governments. ■

UTTAR PRADESH

COSTLY OVERSIGHT

By Prashant Srivastava

A technical lapse could prove to be the undoing of the BJP's carefully cultivated OBC strategy in Uttar Pradesh. The cornerstone of successive victories for it stood in peril on December 27 as the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court ruled that the state proceed with its urban local body elections without reservations for OBCs. Reason? The state government's failure to comply with the Supreme Court-mandated 'triple test'.

The Yogi Adityanath regime seems to have faltered on the very first step of the three laid down by the apex court in its March 2021 ruling—that is, to set up a dedicated data commission to assess backwardness insofar as it pertains to local bodies. The state instead relied on the old procedure of conducting a rapid survey to determine OBC populations in each municipal seat and reserve seats accordingly—a method deemed inadequate by the courts to determine appropriate political representation. Precisely why the triple test was mandated, its very idea being to arrive at meaningful proportions of reservation to ensure representation for the deserving in local administrations and to see the combined quotas for the underprivileged did not exceed 50 per cent.

This was to be the first time the triple test itself would be put to test. As it happens, that might not come to pass. On its part, the UP government challenged the high court ruling the very next day and also formed a five-member commission. There are 762 urban local bodies in UP, including 17 municipal corporations, 200 nagar palika parishads and 545 nagar panchayats. On December 5, the state government had issued a draft notification reserving 27 per cent of the seats in the ULBs. It was this order that the Allahabad HC overruled in its latest judgment.

Opposition parties are having a field day at this turn of events. OBC reservations had been snatched away, Dalits would be next, alleged Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, as he urged the twin cohort to support him. BSP supremo Mayawati seems to have found her voice too, as she accused the BJP of being anti-reservation in its mentality.

ANI

CAUGHT ON THE BACK FOOT, THE YOGI REGIME IS LIKELY TO USE ALL LEGAL MEANS POSSIBLE TO PROTECT OBC QUOTAS

Finding itself on the back foot, the government blamed its officers for not following the new format. Keshav Prasad Maurya, reappointed deputy CM despite losing in the 2022 assembly poll in a nod to the BJP's OBC outreach, issued a hasty reassurance that there was no question of holding local body polls without OBC reservation. All legal options will be accessed for that. ■

MAGAZINE KING

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

GLASSHOUSE

JUST A FRIENDLY CHAT?

Several senior Congress leaders are upset with the timing of **Rahul Gandhi**'s interview with filmstar **Kamal Haasan**, which was released on January 2. The conversation focused on Tamil culture, as the Bharat Jodo Yatra crosses North India. Congress insiders feel that Haasan, whose party Makkal Needhi Maiam had a disastrous outing in 2021, is likely to gain more from the interview, as he has been trying to join the DMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu, which includes the Congress. Rahul's backers say a strong alliance with the DMK makes Tamil Nadu an important state—in 2019, of the 52 Congress Lok Sabha MPs, eight came from Tamil Nadu. Speculation is rife that Haasan may even merge his party with the Congress and become its face in Tamil Nadu.

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Broadening Base

Chasing dreams of a pan-India presence, Bharatiya Rashtra Samithi (BRS) chief and Telangana CM **K. Chandrashekar Rao** is extending his footprint first in Andhra Pradesh. He has picked ex-bureaucrat T. Chandrashekar, a political lightweight, to head the party there. In contiguous Karnataka, where his electoral strength will be tested earlier, he plans to join hands with Janata Dal (Secular) to contest seats with a big Telugu presence. KCR is yet to spell out BRS's national agenda though.

NO WINTER BREAK IN BIHAR

If Rahul Gandhi in a T-shirt during the winter chill is making news, Bihar chief minister **Nitish Kumar's** enthusiasm to work in freezing weather is making his babus sweat. On January 2, when the mercury dipped below normal in Patna, Nitish was ready for his *janata durbar*. But some of his bureaucrats were not. When one arrived late, Nitish greeted him sarcastically with folded hands: "*Aa gaye aap? Bada swagat hai aapka* (Oh, you are here? A big welcome)." He then turned to his team and quipped: "Are all of you late today?" From January 5, Nitish also began his pan-Bihar *yatra*, giving his officials no respite from the cold.

A FLYING RUMOUR

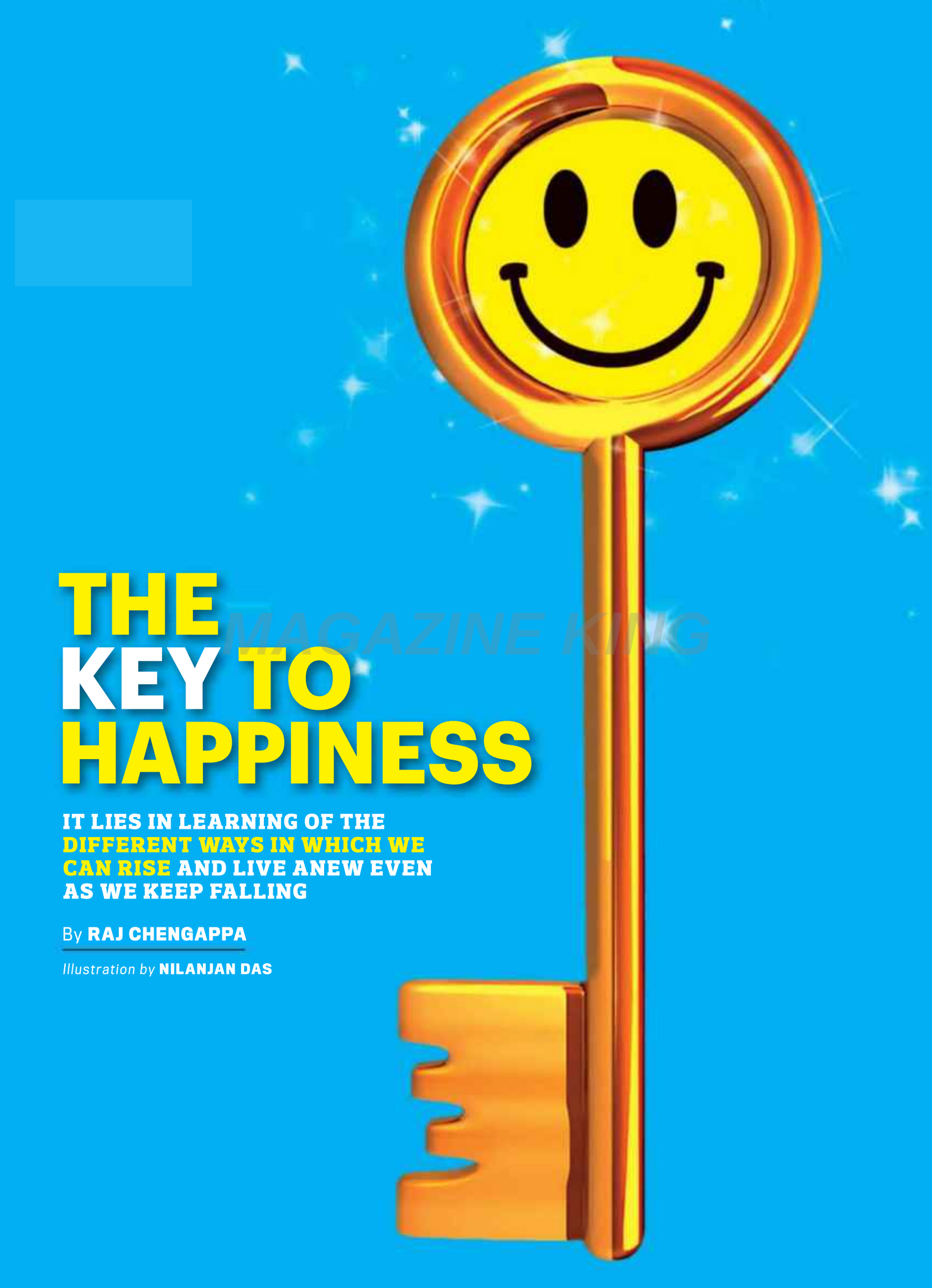
Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader **Ajit Pawar**'s earlier dalliance with the BJP that saw him take charge as the deputy chief minister of Maharashtra in a three-day long government in November 2019 still intrigues many. Pawar is now leader of the Opposition, and rumours continue about his behind-the-scenes bonhomie with the BJP. In December, Pawar air-dashed to Mumbai from Nagpur, where the winter session of the assembly was under way, to welcome senior NCP leader Anil Deshmukh, who was released on bail in an alleged corruption case. What had tongues wagging was the Shinde-BJP government's decision to let Pawar travel by the state's official aircraft. What's cooking?

Cold Vibes

Samajwadi Party chief **Akhilesh Yadav**, who earlier said that he was not invited to join the Uttar Pradesh leg of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, has now conveyed his best wishes to Rahul Gandhi for the same on Twitter. However, he won't take part in it. Nor will any other SP leader. Congress functionaries in UP claim that ties will improve before the Lok Sabha election, but sources close to Akhilesh say he is annoyed with the Congress for two reasons. One, nobody from the Gandhi family attended his father Mulayam Singh Yadav's funeral in October. And two, the memory of the party's unfruitful alliance in the 2017 assembly polls remains all too fresh.

ANI

Kaushik Deka with Dhaval Kulkarni, Prashant Srivastava, Amarnath K. Menon and Amitabh Srivastava



THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

IT LIES IN LEARNING OF THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN RISE AND LIVE ANEW EVEN AS WE KEEP FALLING

By **RAJ CHENGAPPA**

Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**

MAGAZINE KING

IT may seem odd to be talking of happiness when the world has barely emerged from the immense grief two-plus years of the Covid pandemic inflicted on us. Or seen much strife, including the debilitating war in Ukraine that, if allowed to fester, could end up as the war of the worlds. Or to usher a new year with joy when there are dire predictions of a global recession that could lead to massive job cuts, high inflation and heightened misery.

Yet it is precisely why we should be searching for answers to the secrets of happiness. For, as Mahatma Gandhi put it, "Strength does not come from winning. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength." So it is with the quest for happiness—how do you rise even as you keep falling and live anew? The first of the four noble truths enunciated by the Buddha was accepting that the world was full of suffering. The remaining three go into the causes and the paths to attain *moksha*, the ultimate liberation from the seemingly endless cycle of birth and death. The question of how best to do that then itself becomes the quest.

Since 2012, the UN has engaged an independent agency to bring out a World Happiness Report and rank the happiest countries. To assess a nation's state of happiness, the global survey relies on three key markers of well-being: the person's current life evaluation, positive emotions and negative effects. Interestingly, the study found that positive emotions like laughter, enjoyment or learning something new figure twice more frequently in the answers than negative feelings like worry, sadness and anger. The world, it seems, is learning to cope far better than before.

THE PATH TO BLISS, AS WISE MEN HAVE SAID, CAN BE FOUND IN THE ART OF NOT JUST LIVING, BUT ALSO OF GIVING

India, however, inexplicably finds itself among the countries at the bottom of the list in the current edition of the World Happiness Report, figuring below even Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Finland tops the ranking, followed by many other Scandinavian countries, with the combination of material wellbeing, social cohesion and sense of ownership in government policy giving them a decisive advantage. India, though, can take heart from the fact that its citizens do not necessarily have to be bound by such narrow definitions of what constitutes contentment. For, the same study has found that in the past decade, the word "happiness" has occurred more frequently than the phrases "gross domestic product" (GDP), "livelihood and income", the older markers of progress, both of which have seen a declining frequency in usage.

So here we are at the crossroads of a new year, looking at how to navigate the twists and turns that life throws at us and deal with them with an equanimity that redefines the notion of happiness. Not as a national quest to improve the GDP or any personal search for material and physiological comfort but as the many gurus that have contributed to this special issue on happiness have talked about—the art of not just living but giving and in that sharing finding the elusive state of bliss. You will also find in the issue heartwarming stories of exemplars who have forgone their own comforts and found joy in making others feel happy. There are prominent individuals who by their diverse definitions of happiness have given us pause to think on how we look at the ultimate truth of our existence and the paths we can take to achieve or experience it. So, enjoy the read and the ride. ■

MAGAZINE KING

GURU MANTRAS

Wise men have always been part of the Indian tradition, helping humanity navigate the ups and downs of everyday life. Keeping that practice alive are this set of religious savants. Here are their words of wisdom

"Focus on yourself"

By **SWAMI GAUR GOPAL DAS**

MAGAZINE KING

When the state of your mind changes or is negative, even the best of things stop giving pleasure and happiness. But when the state of mind is right, even the simplest things can bring joy. So, the mind can turn heaven into hell or hell into heaven. We need to learn about how to deal with the mind, and how to master our thoughts, emotions and feelings.

When we are constantly looking at others or are being compared to others, we start feeling inadequate. We start feeling we are not enough. That pressure and stress to feel more than enough and trying to be somebody else has taken away the authenticity of life. The problem arises when we get into the mode of looking at others constantly. The more you look at the lives of others, the more you feel your own life is not good or adequate enough. Remember, you have everything in your life at the moment to live a happy life. Focus on yourself.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Stop being obsessed with the need to be happy all the time. Accept your emotions with full authenticity"

I am often asked about maintaining that state of happiness when not feeling happy. We all go through a range of emotions in the course of a day. So, stop being overly obsessed with being happy and positive and the need to be smiling all the time. There is no need to smile all the time. There is no need to be happy all the time. The pressure to be happy and positive is making you negative and miserable. That pressure is toxic and it becomes toxic positivity. Accept your emotions with full authenticity. It's fine to feel low as long as you don't feel low all the time in a chronic way. Stop taking the pressure.

We all have, and go through, pains and struggles in life. If someone is smiling, it doesn't mean they don't have to struggle. Learn to change what you can do about your pain. But also remember there are going to be things that you can't change. Learn to smile, accept what you can't change, and learn to rise above it. Spirituality, mindfulness and meditation are therefore important. So are conscious breathing and being in your space to be able to come to terms.

Choose to look at the brighter side and deal with the negative side of life. No individual in the world can fulfil your expectations. There will be toxic people around. Draw your boundaries, speak clearly and communicate well. We are all work in progress. ■

Swami Gaur Gopal Das is a life coach and motivational speaker

"Share your resources and wisdom to be happy"

By **BABA RAMDEV**

BANDEEP SINGH

MAGAZINE KING

Happiness is the expression of a completely satisfied life. When an individual feels satisfaction in all aspects of life—personal, family, social, financial, professional—then he or she can feel happiness. One may find temporary happiness in materialistic things such as power, wealth, fame and reward but they cannot be the source of eternal and sustainable happiness. One can be happy even without acquiring any of these. Such physical attributes are important for living a comfortable life but are not the ingredients of happiness. For instance, if a person is not healthy, he or she certainly cannot be happy no matter how socially successful he or she is. At the same time, good health doesn't automatically guarantee happiness.

Happiness is not about achieving something or gaining success. It's about sharing your resources and wisdom. You don't earn happiness. You live happy when your existence makes a positive impact on someone else's life. If personal achievement becomes the barometer of happiness, the moment of achievement is the end of that source of happiness and a new form of unhappiness or sense of deprivation begins. Many also get afflicted by the fear of losing what they have achieved. What we don't achieve is more and what we get is always less. Nobody gets more and nobody remains happy in less. The trick of being happy is being content in less and utilising this "less" in the larger interest of mankind and nature.

Happiness also comes from respecting, enjoying and performing with integrity one's professional commitments. An individual must strive for excellence in whatever task he or she sets out to accomplish. Many tend to be overly critical of their professional hazards, but efficiency, commitment and a sense of integrity make the same job a source of internal happiness. Whatever an individual does in life, he or she must start loving their work. People waste a lot of time in competition with others. The objective rather should be striving for excellence in self and discipline in desires.

As human beings, we must follow the laws of nature and the Almighty, the rules of the country we live in and the moral and ethical norms of our society. One who follows all three will always be happy. It's very important for us to surrender to the will of the Almighty. It makes one realise that inclusive, integrated and eternal happiness can be derived from power rooted in service, progress rooted in a noble goal, work rooted in a prayer, valour rooted in humility and revolution rooted in peace.

For any individual looking for happiness in daily life, I suggest they follow these principles:

- Live a moral, disciplined, and scientific life
- Share what you have. Start with feeding an animal, helping a poor person or educating an illiterate one.
- Internalise the truth that you are a unique creation of God. You have all the abilities of the most successful person on earth built into you. You can do wonders too.
- Feel grateful to God
- Stay indifferent to negative elements or happenings in the society and seek inspiration from positive developments. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"The trick of being happy is to be content in less and utilising this 'less' in the larger interest of mankind and nature"

Swami Ramdev is a spiritual guru and a businessman

VIKRAM SHARMA

"Practise traffic control of the mind"

By **SISTER B.K. SHIVANI**

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Do not accept an unhappy state of mind as normal. Jealousy, anger are not normal, love, peace are"

Happiness is a state of mind. But today we believe happiness is what we achieve or what we buy, that it is dependent on external situations and achievements. The truth is, happiness is our nature, our way of being. When the mind is calm and stable, it is in a healthy state and that health of the mind is happiness.

Being in that healthy state of mind is in our hands. For instance, if I am stuck in a traffic jam, I can choose to create stress or be stable. When things do not go my way, I can choose to get hurt or remain healthy. Happiness is a healthy mind; when the mind is in a comfortable state, it is the opposite of a disturbed mind.

For me, it matters how my state of mind is in every situation of the day. Let me explain why. When my mind's graph does not fluctuate, then I have been happy throughout the day. By fluctuation, I mean getting excited one moment, feeling low the next.

To be truly happy, it is important that you stop living a life of blame. By this, I mean blaming people and situations for your own condition. Blame games show emotional dependence. Creating your own thoughts, feelings and steering clear of any dependency will lead to a happy life.

I now live a life of awareness, so when making a mistake, even if it is in my mind only, I immediately correct it. My advice—practise traffic control of the mind. Pause for a minute after every hour and check your thoughts, it helps to prepare the mind for the next hour.

One of the biggest problems today is that people have accepted an unhappy state of mind as normal. Do not do that. Jealousy, anger, worry and stress are not normal, while love, happiness and peace are. It's time to change your definition of normal. For once you know what is normal, you will automatically (consciously or subconsciously) start doing things towards achieving it. ■

***Sr Shivani is a well-known teacher of Rajyoga meditation and host of the popular TV show* Awakening with Brahma Kumaris**

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INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Being happy is important. Only when you are happy can you make others happy"

"Be more action-oriented than result-oriented"

MAGAZINE KING

By **MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI**

Just like any other decision, happiness is also a decision. You need to tell yourself that whatever happens in life, you will be happy, you will be strong, because you are not alone; the whole universe, the power of God is with you. Whether we laugh or cry, the days will pass.

Happiness is our true nature. So, whether it is you or anyone else, happiness is everything, it is the very purpose of life. It is purely subjective, but its outer experience comes when we cultivate a mind that remains unperturbed, no matter what changes take place in the external world.

We ourselves are the only source of happiness in the world. If happiness were really rooted in worldly objects, everyone would get happiness from those. We have to understand this truth—happiness is not in objects, it is within us. We are the one source of happiness. This understanding itself can help us gain control over our desires. In turn, we will become more peaceful and experience our own inner joy.

We are born to experience happiness and we live our lives struggling to attain it. The tragedy is that most of us die without ever truly experiencing it. Moreover, we can only give others what we have. If we are unhappy, we will be able to share only unhappiness with others. To be happy is most important because only happy people can be successful—both in their personal and professional life.

These are a few tips on how to be happy:

• Be content with yourself: It doesn't mean curbing your ambition or to stop earning, but being content with what you possess

• Be selfless: Don't be just a taker but a giver too. Earn as much as you wish, but learn to return as much as you can to society. Look beyond your own family to the world.

• Follow dharma: It means a life of values such as truthfulness, kindness, and showing others respect

• Be more action-oriented than result-oriented: When you are anxious about the result of a particular action, it not only prevents you from utilising your full potential but also affects the outcome of the action. On the other hand, when you are completely focused on the action, it helps you tap into your inner capabilities, bringing out the best in you.

• Give equal importance to logic and faith: Create a balance between the head and the heart. It means the external world of objectivity and the inner world of subjective reality, the mystery aspect of life.

• Meditate and pray for God's grace, for the support and blessing of the whole, of which we are only parts. ■

Mata Amritanandamayi or Amma is a Hindu spiritual leader

The Chemistry of Contentment

By **BHARAT THAKUR**

BANDEEP SINGH

MAGAZINE KING

Contentment is difficult to define, especially in physiological and material terms, because it has so many dimensions, layers, ingredients, juices and flavours. It is about the interactions of all of these and the net effect they produce. There is a soup of hormones that your body secretes to get there:

Endorphins are neurotransmitters that are the body's natural painkillers. They are powerful analgesics produced by the hypothalamus and pituitary glands of the brain in response to stress and pain. While running for a long distance, you may find yourself wanting to stop out of exhaustion. But if you endure, you feel a surge of energy. It's called the 'runner's high' or 'the second wind'. When you do an activity beyond your threshold, endorphins are released, so that you can ignore the pain and go on. Regular exercise, yoga, brisk walks, exposure to sun, meditation, music, dance, laughter and intimacy keep the endorphin pathways robust and active.

Dopamine is also a neurotransmitter called the 'reward chemical'. When we feel hungry, we reach out for food we like, anticipating that it will satisfy our hunger. When it does, the action feels pleasurable, and so we get conditioned to reach out for it when we are hungry. The anticipation of the feeling of reward motivates us, and the pleasure comes from the release of dopamine. When we crack a puzzle or a game for the first time, it feels good. But we don't get the same high when we repeat it. So, we crave a new high. This increasing craving is said to be the neurobiological basis of seeking out new adventures and taking higher risks. Dopamine also gives you an appetite for learning and makes you attentive, it keeps your memory sharp, it is a great stimulant for creativity, and it makes you super-confident.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Well-being, it seems, is not intended to be cracked like a formula, but lived, felt and immersed in"

Serotonin is called the 'happy hormone'. It is the main "feelgood" chemical because it plays a huge role in regulating our moods. If serotonin is at normal levels, you feel focused, emotionally stable, optimistic and calm. Conversely, low levels are associated with depression. Did you know that 90 per cent of the body's serotonin is made in the gut, where it helps control your bowel function and speeds up digestion? It gives you the feeling of satiation after a nice meal and makes us say 'enough' for even foods we love. When serotonin and dopamine levels are adequate, you get quality sleep.

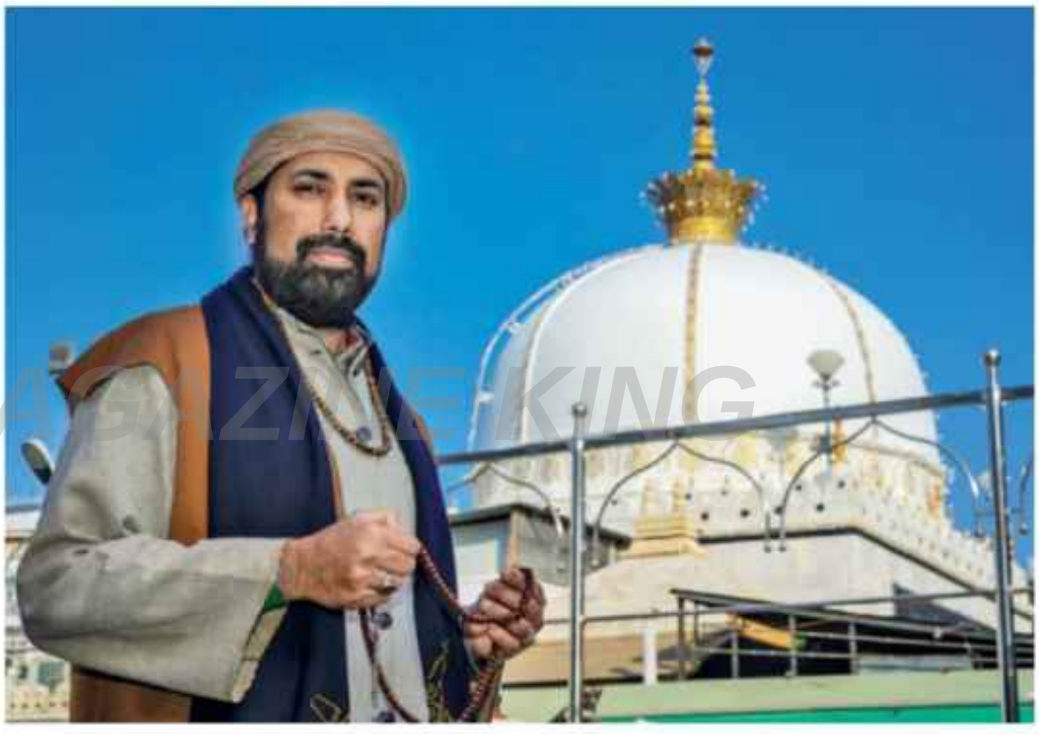
Oxytocin is called the 'love hormone' because it is the one that promotes bonding between mother and baby. Every time the mother feeds the baby, oxytocin floods her bloodstream, deepening the mother-child bond. Oxytocin also flows freely during intimate moments between lovers, when you bond with a friend, and even when you cuddle your pet or adore your plants. Oxytocin also encourages one to be drawn to people they identify with and disconnect from people they don't.

Each one of these hormones seems to take care of different aspects of our good feelings. Each is multi-dimensional and fundamentally connected with the health of our vital organs. Nature seems to activate these feelgood chemicals through our simple choices and actions. Well-being, it seems, is not intended to be understood and cracked like a formula, but lived, felt and immersed in. ■

Bharat Thakur is a spiritual teacher and renowned yoga expert

"Unconditional love, equality best way to achieve bliss"

By **HAJI SYED SALMAN CHISHTY**



DEEPAK SHARMA

MAGAZINE KING

Growing up in Ajmer Dargah Sharif, an incredible 800-year-old historical neighbourhood, one got to witness people from all parts of India coming to seek blessings, people of varied faiths and religious backgrounds, who spoke different languages and had different traditions and cultural practices. Serving all those who come to the Dargah Ajmer Sharif brings us the greatest happiness. The spiritual elders of the Khuddam-e-Khwaja Sufi community have always taught us never to ask the name, religion, faith or the native land of anyone who comes to the dargah. If one had to ask a question, it is how can we serve these seekers who flock to the Ajmer Dargah Darbar Sharif?

One of the most profound teachings of Khwaja Gharib Nawaz Moinuddin Hasan Chishty is that true happiness is in seeking closeness to the Divine Creator. To achieve that, one should dedicate oneself to service with unconditional love, compassion and equality, exemplified by attributes of Nature itself, as learning to being gracious like the Sun, generous like the river and hospitable like the Earth.

The ultimate purpose is the evolution of our spiritual being. By dedicating ourselves to our creator, we align ourselves with this purpose. The ups and downs of life will not seem so urgent then as we realise that the material world is ephemeral. What matters is the alignment of our intentions and actions with our goal of spiritual mastery.

Change won't come in a day, nor will it come easy. But if you start now by making the smallest commitment to leading a better, happier life, the road will be less rocky.

God says in the Hadith Qudsi: "Take one step towards me, I will take 10 towards you. Walk towards me, I will run towards you." Take the first step! God will be with you, making sure you have the power to continue. Inshallah. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Take the first step. God will ensure that you have the power to continue"

Haji Chishty is the current Gaddi Nashin, Dargah Ajmer Sharif, and chairman, Chishty Foundation

HARDIK CHHABRA

MAGAZINE KING

"Beatitude comes when we are merciful"

By **HIS GRACE ANIL JOSEPH THOMAS COUTO**

Happiness is something that every human being yearns for, be it healthwise, wealthwise, in personal relationships or in social positions. No one wants to be unhappy. Whenever our dreams are fulfilled, our plans materialise, our needs are met, whether emotional or material, we experience happiness. But from a Christian perspective, happiness is deeper than this, which our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to us. In fact, what our Lord Jesus Christ has spoken of is joy, rather than happiness. He has said, "My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full."

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"True happiness is not in self-centredness. Switch your focus to others. How can I bring joy to others...how can I help and uplift others"

What Jesus our Lord has given to us is the truth about being joyful. He says that you will be joyful when your hearts are open to God's grace. Therefore, repentance and conversion of hearts is the beginning of a life of joy, peace and love. When our Lord Jesus Christ began his ministry, he was in the desert, fasting and praying, and the evil one came to tempt him—to a life of pleasures, power, wealth and popularity. He shunned all this, telling the evil one: "You shall not tempt your Lord...for man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." And, therefore, Christ our Lord has given to us the path of beatitudes. Beatitude means to be happy, to be joyful. And which is this path? He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Therefore, joyfulness does not come in acquiring more and more wealth but being poor in spirit. Beatitude comes when we are merciful. Therefore, when we are compassionate, kind and gracious towards others, when we take care of the needs of others, then we will experience great joy and great happiness.

Also, when we reconcile with others rather than divide, we will experience great joy. And this is precisely the secret of joy which our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed: "Love one another as I have loved you." And how has he loved us? By sacrificing his life for us. Thus, true joy comes in sacrificing our life for others and not in trying to acquire everything for ourselves. When we remove from our hearts everything that is against God—all thoughts of hatred, evil and wickedness—and allow God's grace to fill our hearts, that is what's called to be "pure of heart". This is the secret to happiness. ■

His Grace Anil Joseph Thomas Couto is the Archbishop of Delhi

WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?

From spending some quality time with their family to making a breakthrough at work, from helping out the underprivileged to helping themselves to a large slice of pizza... Inspirational personalities from different walks of life share what happiness means to them

MAGAZINE KING

YASIR IQBAL

RAVI KISHAN, 53

Bhojpuri actor and MP from Gorakhpur

"For me, the meaning of happiness is to give happiness to others. I love to help others and it gives me a feeling of satisfaction. Even before I entered politics, I liked lending a helping hand to those struggling in life. Once, even I was a struggler, and I have experienced the pain that comes with it. Arranging beds in hospitals for those in need, arranging food for the poor...I have been doing these things for years. Apart from this, listening to old songs and swimming bring me a lot of happiness. I have a dream of opening a regional film city in UP, preferably in Gorakhpur. If it happens this year, then it will definitely be my biggest moment of happiness in 2023."

GETTY IMAGES

SHEFALI SHAH, 49

Actress

"Happiness to me is being with my loved ones, all of us safe, healthy and happy. There's food, banter, laughter, music, dance...or just doing nothing at all. But all filled with love and laughter in unison. And the peace that comes with it. It's the feeling of knowing all is well in my world. I experienced it recently while on a holiday in Africa. Watching these awe-inspiring creatures—whether the Big Five or the whale shark—in their natural habitat, some at close proximity of two to three feet. The silence, the occasional sound of my two boys bantering and laughing, and most importantly all of us together enjoying each moment to the fullest. Priceless."

APRAMEYA RADHAKRISHNA, 40

Co-founder and CEO, Koo

"Happiness is when you can eat what you love and yet be healthy, when you can work your heart out and not be stressed, when you know that someone else loves you more than you love yourself and when you can lead your life every day like a curious child without the baggage of the past."

NANDAN DAVE

JIGNESH MEVANI, 42

Dalit rights activist and Congress MLA in Gujarat

"Doing absolutely nothing is the joy of life. Discussing Mareez and reciting his poetry at a* chai ki kitli *with friends is true happiness. When I discover a new piece of writing by Mareez as part of my ongoing research, it gives me much gratification. Engaging in deep philosophical conversations about literature with like-minded people is also a time well-spent. In any case, watching Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag and Vivian Richards bat was divine happiness, not to forget how Instagram reels of Priyanka Chopra always make me happy."

RAKUL PREET SINGH, 32

Actress

"It might sound spiritual, but I truly believe that happiness is something you exude from within, and how content you are with who you are as a person and with your family. It is not subject to anything materialistic. It's not, 'Oh, my film became a block-buster, and I am happy!' It's a state of being and nothing external can influence it. When you are happy regardless of what's happening around you or whether you see success or failure, your state of being is happy. Anything to do with the love of the audiences, of the industry and people around me is a source of true joy."

BANDEEP SINGH

MAGAZINE KING

DR D. NAGESHWARA REDDY, 66

Chairman and Managing Director, Asian Institute of Gastroenterology and AIG Hospitals, Hyderabad

"Happiness is being satisfied with what you are doing. The very reason for me to continue with medicine, especially GI endoscopy, was the sheer happiness it brought—not just to me as a clinician but to the thousands of patients and their families. The procedures that looked impossible two to three decades ago are now part of our routine practice. My happiness also comes from the research that we do, involving multidisciplinary teams, which eventually translates into better patient care. It is indeed gratifying to first conceptualise what is needed to help solve a practical clinical challenge and then see how basic science researchers and clinicians come together to find a solution. Finally, listening to patients, trying to understand their concerns, and addressing these in the most empathetic manner gives me the kind of happiness I will always cherish."

SUBIR HALDER

MAGAZINE KING

MIMI CHAKRABORTY, 33

Trinamool Congress MP and actress

"If I am the reason for someone's happiness, if I am the reason for someone's smile, that definitely makes me happy. My job makes me happy. Or spending time with my family and pets makes me happy. When I am on a holiday, in a no-network zone and my phone is not ringing, it makes me happy. When I feed the strays, it makes me happy and helps me have a good sleep. And so does a large slice of pizza."

PAPON, 47

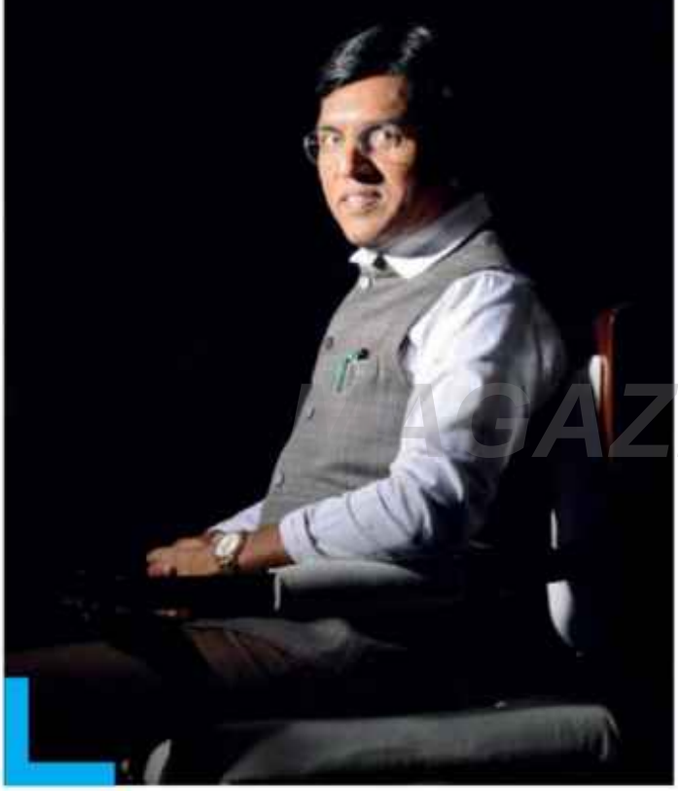
Singer

"Happiness is something that brings a smile, gives you satisfaction and contentment with what you do, how you live your life and who you are with. True happiness for me comes from little things in life like just being able to be who you are, be with your near and dear ones, travelling with my band and meeting people while I am touring and share different perspectives. Right now, the happiest moment, the one I will relive for some time, is taking my son Puhor, a football and Messi fan, to Qatar to see the World Cup semis between Argentina and Croatia."

MANSUKH MANDAVIYA, 50

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare

"I derive happiness from many things. If I am able to complete my day's work by the evening, I feel happy. I feel happy when I meet beneficiaries of government schemes and they tell me how their lives are witnessing a positive change. Spending quality time with my family makes me happy. I enjoy reading good books. Cycling makes me very happy. I feel happy while interacting with people from different walks of life. I feel very happy whenever I get a chance to visit my native village Hanol in Gujarat's Bhavnagar. I feel happy while talking to the people of my village or while roaming around on its streets and in the farm fields."



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

GHAZAL ALAGH, 34

Co-founder and Chief Innovation Officer, Mamaearth

"Happiness is a choice and I choose happiness every day. Life keeps throwing challenging situations at us, both personally and professionally. But one needs to make a choice to be happy. Clarity of my day, week and month is pivotal for my sanity. I don't like working in chaotic situations. I plan everything, right from work meetings to journaling to taking my kids to the doctor. Everything is on my calendar. That helps me navigate through my day well and easily, and makes me happy. My mantra for happiness is simple—eat healthy, work out, and make time for yourself. These are the most underestimated things, but have a lasting impact on an individual's well-being. Optimising time to laugh out loud once during the day, be it by dancing with my team, or creating an Instagram reel with my co-founder husband, or just singing with my kids...it also adds to prioritising happiness on a daily basis."

SHEKHAR GHOSH

MAGAZINEKING

SHILPA RAO, 38

Singer

"I think happiness is more of a state of mind and has nothing to do with what you have or do. I think you need to see and create a balance between how you are and how you feel; it's actually quite simple, but difficult to achieve. I also feel there is pressure that you always need to be happy, and it's a very dangerous concept as you cannot be happy all the time. We all should look within ourselves for happiness, and not outside. There are many things that make me happy. Like when I see my brother Anurag, I think he is the most beautiful thing that has happened to me. When I think of my grandparents, I feel I was very lucky to receive such unconditional love from them. When I look at my fans while I am performing, it makes me realise I have so many things in my life that give me happiness. Happiness is not a commodity driven by me, but it's more experiential and more of what I feel; that is what happiness means to me."

SUNNY LEONE, 41

Actress

"As time goes by, happiness is something we tend to take for granted. So trying to find the positive in everything that comes our way is how I see happiness. What makes me happy is my family. Just one smile from my children Nisha, Asher and Noah or when they greet me with a 'Hi, mama' can turn the worst day into the best. They are a gift from God, and every time I see them, I feel happy inside. When Nisha came home and then Asher and Noah were born, these were the happiest moments in my life. It has been an amazing roller coaster ride, but very satisfying."

MAGAZINE KING

URMILA KANORIA, 80

Art patron

"Artistic creations have always made me happy. As an art patron, when my artists get an award or recognition, or if their work is valued and they are successful in their life, it gives me true happiness. I believe art is at the core of preserving the beauty of our civilisation, nature and cultures. Art talks to me, it tells me stories of contemporary life, and stories of history, of dreams and possibilities. When I see or experience a good art piece, it gives me immense happiness. If I am able to be that catalyst in turning a potential into recognition, and be the medium for people to be able to access young artists' work, I feel satisfaction and happiness."

MALLIKA SARABHAI, 68

Classical dancer

DANESH JASSAWALA

"Happiness for me is twofold: feeling fit and healthy and being able to jump out of bed wanting to face a new day, and doing something every day to bring light and a smile to someone. The thrill of a standing ovation and the acknowledgement and awards from certain institutions can bring a momentary gladness, but for me true happiness is making a difference in people's lives, using my voice for the voiceless, justice for the marginalised. That brings meaning to life. It makes one's presence on this planet meaningful. Well-being comes from loving and being loved. True lasting happiness comes from a sense of well-being, and that comes from a body and mind well looked after, and then using those for positive change. In today's cynical world, that might sound like a sanctimonious talk, but for me, it is true happiness."

MAGAZINE KING

DANESH JASSAWALA

ABHISHEK JAIN, 36

Hindi and Gujarati film director

"In today's information-loaded and tech-savvy world, what makes me happy is a new experience. Not information, but new knowledge, new wisdom, enlightenment... something we know is out there in the clutter, and amidst all of it, if I find a pearl in the form of knowledge, that gives me a lot of happiness. Otherwise, there are a lot of material things that do give happiness, but when I actually think about it, at the core of it all, a new challenge excites me more and gives me a certain adrenaline rush. Nothing is more gratifying than experiencing that moment of epiphany."

N.V. RAMA RAJU, 60

Managing Director, Jalavihar, Hyderabad

"The secret to happiness is to always express gratitude for what you have attained in life. Being a first-generation entrepreneur, what gives me immense joy is the journey of getting where I am today. It took a lot of sacrifice and perseverance... but happiness to me is enjoying life's uncertainties with the support of my family and friends. My success and balance sheet are defined by the friends I have. Doing whatever I can to the best of my abilities and sharing their struggles give me satisfaction. It is my way of expressing gratitude for having them in my life...and to be happy."

INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

VOX POP

CHIRAG SHETTY, 25

Doubles badminton player, ranked No. 5 in the world

"My idea of happiness, professionally, is to win tournaments [with doubles partner Satwiksairaj Reddy]. Personally, it is spending quality time with my family and friends, the people I love the most. The best experience I have had on the court so far was when India won the Thomas Cup in 2022. Since the day I started playing badminton, one of my dreams was to be called a World Champion and it came true last year. That feeling of being on top of the world is simply indescribable. Coming back home after such victories to a warm welcome and to see my family and friends celebrate my accomplishments with pride and happiness...that's what I live for."

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

ANUPRIYA PATEL, 41

Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, MP from UP's Mirzapur

"There's only one happiness in life—to love and to be loved. Fortunately, my public life brings me that world of happiness. True happiness lies in being able to support the underprivileged and marginalised. Working tirelessly for empowering the disadvantaged sections brings me constant showers of their love and blessings. It's invaluable and beyond words to express."

MAGAZINE KING

MANISH RAJPUT

NILANJAN BHOWAL, 57

Architect

"Breathing in the fresh air, the smell of the wet earth, the sight of birds in the sky and the sound of a flowing stream—being at one with nature makes me the most happy. I am happiest in the hills, where nature is still pristine and untouched by development. In the hills, the air is still pure and I can feel it fill up my lungs. I love taking long walks in the pinewood forests, surrounded by chirping birds. I also want to give back to nature, and not only take from it. This is what drives me, designing small habitats where people can stay in harmony and consonance with nature."

MAGAZINE KING

AMRUTA FADNAVIS, 43

Singer, banker

"Happiness, I feel, is a state of mind. There are external factors that make you happy, but you have to find happiness within first. That will help you absorb the external happiness better. There are many external factors, but for me, the best reason to make myself happy is to see happiness in the eyes of those around me. Happiness is also the greatest form of success that you can experience in life. Being with my daughter, touching those notes perfectly when I sing during *riyaz*, and seeing smiles on the faces of those who have benefited from the work done through my NGOs—all these things make me happy."

MANDAR DEODHAR

MANDAR DEODHAR

ANUKRTI UPADHYAY, 48

Poet, writer

"Autumn light. Sky the soft hue of a blue jay's wing. Colours ripening in the woods on the slopes of a mountain. A yellow bloom in the green bedewed grass. The mild cold smell of the oncoming season. Brown fragrant slow-brewed coffee in a tall glass. Birds, squirrels, falling leaves. A book, a slice of time, quietude. An interval for silence, solitude, sequestration. Joy flows through many channels and seeps away from innumerable cracks. But for me, it has one perennial source—to sit amongst nature with my own self and look inside, root around, unearth, discover. In the external stillness, come the clamouring words. In the everyday business of life, these liminal spaces are where true joy—the* anand *that has no form or feature and is purely experiential—happens."

SANDESH RAVIKUMAR

INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

VOX POP

DIVYA GOKULNATH, 36

Co-founder, BYJU'S

"Happiness, I believe, is an internal feeling of being one with the universe. It is influenced by our thoughts and attitudes. My happiness does not depend on external validation, but rather comes from within myself. It is a sense of connection and alignment with the world around me. It is a feeling of fulfilment and contentment that arises from living a life that is in line with my values and goals. There is no shortage of happy moments in my life because I seek happiness in the ordinary and I find bliss in the commonplace. There is no formula for happiness, just like there is no formula for success. I can only share the five commandments I follow, rather instinctively, to remain positive and happy:

- **Practise gratitude:** Focus on things you are thankful for
- **Cultivate positive relationships:** Surround yourself with positive and supportive people who uplift, inspire and love you
- **Practise self-care:** There is a strong connection between physical health and mental well-being. I start my day early and exercise for half an hour that supplies me the daily dose of endorphins
- **Practise mindfulness:** Being present in the moment can help us find a sense of connection and meaning in our lives
- **Remain humble:** Thinking too highly of ourselves can make us complacent and resistant to change, which can prevent us from learning and growing as individuals."

MAGAZINE KING

BANDEEP SINGH

BHAVINA PATEL, 36

Silver medallist Paralympian table tennis player

"Happiness is when I think of helping someone and being able to make a positive difference in their lives."

BHUMI PEDNEKAR, *33*

Actress

"Gratification for me comes when people recognise, praise and love my work, whether it's an effort that I made on social media to advocate for environmental awareness or a character that I played on screen, like Sandhya of* Dum Laga Ke Haisha. *Despite how unusual and off-beat it was for a Hindi film heroine, I felt almost giddy with happiness that they found her to be an inspiration."

BANDEEP SINGH

BIBEK DEBROY, *67*

Economist and author

"Happiness is a state of mind. It has nothing to do with relationships with others, or with possession of material objects and status. Internally, happiness is linked with a state of being at peace, as the Bhagavad Gita also says. Therefore, the search for happiness is within and it requires some detachment from, and indifference to, the external world. I love the translations I do from Sanskrit to English and I am happy in their midst. They almost have a meditative function. And that state of happiness, while translating, seems to brush off on a general sense of warmth and well-being. People have written books about being happy. But the answer is always within."

YASIR IQBAL

MAGAZINE KING

KHESARI LAL YADAV, 36

Bhojpuri superstar

"Happiness seems to me a personal phenomenon and the reasons vary from person to person. For me, it comes only when others feel happy, entertained and in bliss from what I bring to their lives. True happiness comes only when people around you—followers, family, and friends—are also happy. Even more, I feel glad if part of their happiness is owing to what I have done or if I've brought smiles to their faces. I also feel extremely happy if someone from my village achieves success.

I always tell those I interact with to make people close to them happy. If they are happy and content, you will automatically be happy. Then there are the little things in life. At a very individual level, I remember laughing in my mind when my 12-year-old daughter, Kirti, told me how to persuade my wife, who, being a traditional woman, has a thin tolerance for my working with actresses. So, as a father, I feel so proud and blessed when my young daughter tells me how to handle things."

RANJAN RAHI

BANDEEP SINGH

GUNJAN MENON, 30

Conservationist and filmmaker

"The first birdsong I can hear in the evening brings me pure joy."

MAGAZINE KING

PANKAJ R. PATEL, 69

Chairman, Zydus Lifesciences Ltd

"It is always the quest that inspires me, so when we attempt and arrive at something new, novel, differentiated and out-of-the-box, it gives me immense satisfaction and happiness. I love new ideas as they unlock new dimensions. Also, simple things in life are a source of great joy for me, like spending time with my family, and giving back to society in the causes that I support. I believe that one must always have the heart of an explorer and nurturer."

NANDAN DAVE

VIKRAM SHARMA

DIYA KUMARI, 51

MP and princess of Jaipur royalty

"I find my happiness in simpler things in life. Ever since I was a child, I was taught by my parents to find contentment in small things and to value them. And that is what I have imbibed and followed. Having a meal with my children, a family holiday or a leisurely cup of coffee with my friends—these are the things that bring utmost happiness to me. The joy that the love and affection of your family and friends can bring is second to none and can definitely not be found in materialistic luxuries."

MAGAZINE KING

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

BANDEEP SINGH

MAHUA MOITRA, 48

Member of Parliament

"Being in a kind, loving space with no negative energy. With my family and my dogs. Drinking* adrak chai *and eating toast and* bhujia. *And, watching the BJP lose a few elections :-)"

JAYANT CHAUDHARY, 44

MP and president, Rashtriya Lok Dal

"In politics, you have to be deeply committed to your causes and people, which means spending a lot of time away from the family and material comforts of your own home. Naturally, the time we can prioritise for the family is satisfying. However, I believe happiness is a state of being and the mind rather than just a few fleeting joyful events or moments. When the body is healthy, the mind is positive and things on the career front and in personal life are progressing and dynamic, even small things such as a good meal, a successful day packed with programmes, or the occasional casual lazy day can build into what qualifies as deep, true happiness for me."

NEERAJ CHOPRA, 25

Olympic gold medalist

"For me, happiness is when you are pleased with who you are as a person. Achieving goals that I have set for myself makes me happy, but it is more important for me to know that I have done everything to stretch and grow my capabilities regardless of the final result. Medals and results are only decided basis the day and moment. However, you completely control the effort and dedication you put in, and knowing that I have given my 100 per cent gives me immense satisfaction and happiness. The best moment for me has to be winning gold for India at the Tokyo Olympics 2020. There are so many people who have supported and encouraged me, including my family, my coaches and my team. At that moment, it felt like all of our efforts and hard work paid off. As an athlete, you spend a lifetime preparing for the big moments, and when it all falls into place, it feels special. To represent over a billion Indians and bring home the gold gave me immense pride and joy."

BANDEEP SINGH

RICHA CHADHA, 36

Actress

"I think the perfect recipe for happiness in a true sense is eight hours of sleep, great nutrition, healthy and nurturing relationships and authenticity. If you have all those things, you are unlikely to be sad for a long time at least. If you are still persistently sad, visit a doctor. There is no shame in seeking help for your mental health."

MAGAZINE KING

BANDEEP SINGH

BANDEEP SINGH

RAKESH TIKAIT, 53

Farmer union leader

"To run a tractor in an open field and the aroma of the* mitti *(soil) gives me happiness. Whenever I am tense, I work in the field, and to see the dust rise from the field is a sight of pure joy."

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

MAGAZINE KING

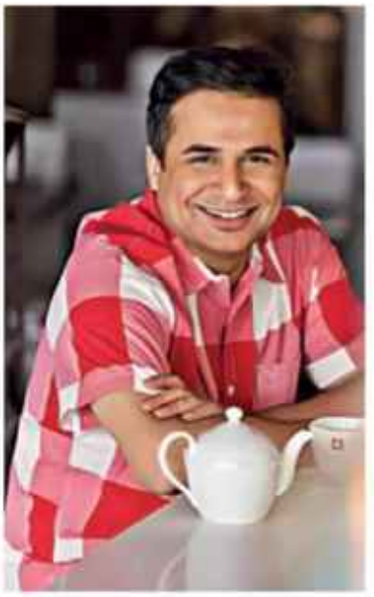
PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI, 43

Rajya Sabha member

"Being able to spend time with my family, reading books, listening to music and the feeling of being able to contribute directly to the lives of people. These are things that make me personally very happy. I read a lot of non-fiction. Earlier, I used to read a lot of fiction, but I have shifted to non-fiction. I love reading about contemporary history and the biographies of famous people who inspire me. Geopolitics is one area I am passionate about. Those are the kinds of books that I like reading. In fiction, I read P.G. Wodehouse, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Pakistani author Moni Mohsin. I am a Hindi music buff, but not old music. I like listening to peppy songs that are more current in flavour and which add to the tempo and lift your spirit. I am a big fan of Arijit Singh and Papon."

SUVIR SARAN, 50

Chef



"Happiness for me is that moment when I find myself in command of my being, when I am at peace with the ups and downs of life, and when I appreciate my failures as lessons. It is the strength that keeps me grounded when my life is taking dark turns towards the unknown. It is the joyful tears that flow for the good fortune of another. I see happiness in the oneness I find with the world at large, when I see our mosaic thriving together even as we are made of myriad individual and diverse fragments."

SUMANT SINHA, 57

Chairman and MD, ReNew Power

RAJWANT RAWAT

"Happiness. It is the crux of human existence. All of human philosophy is about understanding and finding happiness. Very few of us do. Our lives are spent in its pursuit, mostly with a mistaken understanding of what we want, and therefore, for most, it remains elusive. I think happiness comes from realising that you can't find it in the external world, it lies within you; through managing your expectations; in reducing the things that give you happiness or sadness; in realising that true happiness comes from freedom—from material and emotional wants."

SANJIV PURI, 60

Chairman & Managing Director, ITC Ltd

"Doing well certainly makes one happy, but what really delights me is being able to do good for society as an enterprise while doing so."

HARDIK CHABBRA

PRIYA AGARWAL HEBBAR, 33

Non-Executive Director, Vedanta

"Happiness is a state of mind and is completely independent of your assets and monetary gains. I have seen my father's happiest moments when he did something for the betterment of others. He made sure he inculcated the same in us. I get immense happiness and satisfaction when a university we support churns out employable youth, when a community we work with does not have to walk miles for pure drinking water. The moment a rescued stray comes running to me at a Yoda shelter, I look into his eyes and I know it is the ultimate happiness I can find on this earth."

BANDEEP SINGH

MAGAZINE KING

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

NEHA SINGH RATHORE, 25

Bhojpuri folk singer of 'Bihar Mein Ka Ba' fame

"As a child, happiness for me was taking a dip in the Karmanasa river during summer holidays and returning home in the afternoon only to get scolded by the elders and run again to our orchards to gather mangos. And then, I grew up and found all kinds of restrictions awaiting me, for I was a girl, only to realise that happiness meant freedom. Today, when I'm leading my life with a partner of my choice and I have almost everything at my disposal to make this life easy, I have come to realise that happiness resides within us, and we take all the trouble just to find it."

MAGAZINE KIN

CarryMinati, 23

a.k.a. Ajey Nagar, YouTuber

"Most people equate happiness with reaching a milestone or accomplishing a goal, but I am happy living life in the moment. I don't think about the past and future. I feel the more you live in the present, the happier you are. One of my happiest moments was when I hit 100,000 subscribers on YouTube. When you have left something to start something new and it takes off—it's a wholesome moment."

SHEKHAR GHOSH

GOPAL SRINIVASAN, 64

Chairman & MD, TVS Capital

"Feeling complete, or *purnata*, is the source of happiness. For most of us, this is the direction towards which we perform our life's work as a *sadhana*. Having a goal, working for it and learning to be satisfied with our best efforts, helping and serving others whenever we get the opportunity without expecting anything in return...doing all this in the company of those we love, who make us comfortable and accept us—with our flaws and strengths—is the road to happiness. And the *uttam marg* beyond all this, to happiness and to bliss, is *prapatti*—elusive to most, but a dream to pursue."

INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

VOX POP

AJAY PIRAMAL, 67

Chairman, Piramal Group

BANDEEP SINGH

"Our scriptures tell us that the goal of all humans is the pursuit of happiness. We achieve true happiness from within ourselves and not from external events. I am making my own humble effort in getting there. *Seva Bhav* is what I practise and espouse. I derive immense happiness from following this principle in my daily life. 2022 has been a watershed year for our family as my wife Swati and I became grandparents to twins. Another area of immense joy is the work the Piramal Foundation is doing to make a difference in the areas of education, health, water and women's empowerment in the 112 aspirational districts. The empowerment of its beneficiaries will help the country progress, not just on economic parameters, but also in social well-being and happiness."

BANDEEP SINGH

SREEJESH PARATTU, 34

Goalkeeper of the Indian hockey team

"I find happiness in small things. It starts with waking up early in the morning to train. I enjoy my mom's food. Wherever you go, you won't find that taste and love. Sitting by the window seat in a crowded bus, listening to good music, or sometimes just sitting alone talking to yourself..."

MAGZIMKING

YAMINI REDDY, 40

Kuchipudi dancer

"I feel the happiest when I am completely immersed in my dance. When I have had a gruelling session of dance, the body is tired, but the mind and heart reach a point where they are completely disconnected from the surroundings, and I feel like I am floating in a realm of complete bliss—that is when I feel truly happy. Also, when I am completely consumed by the creative process of dance, I am able to bring to life my thoughts and feelings, and eventually share them with people."

GETTY IMAGES

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

M. JAGADESH KUMAR, 60

Chairman, University Grants Commission

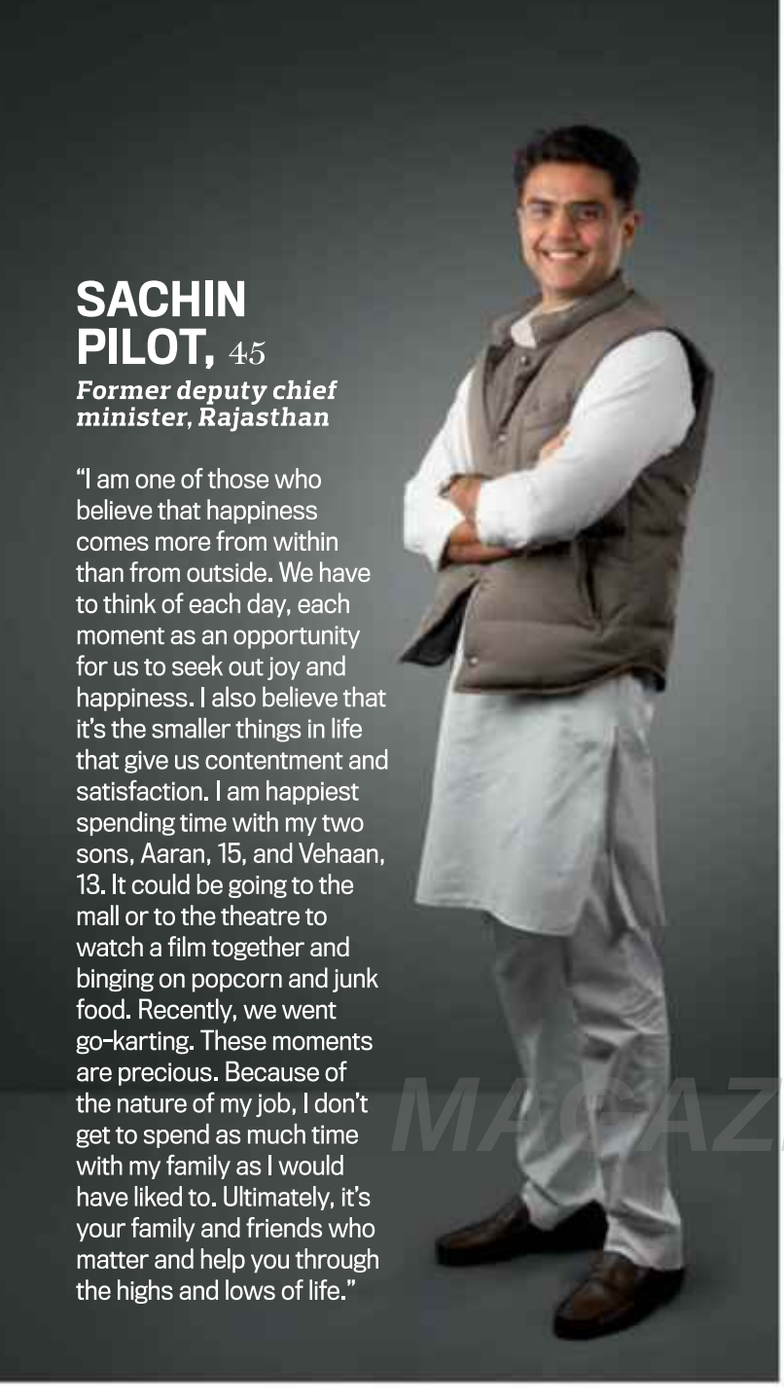
"I constantly strive to live in the present, which is important for my mental wellness. I take responsibility for my happiness, which helps me lead a life of contentment rather than mere survival. When I experience despair and crises, my positive attitude and the support of my family give me the strength to cope with challenges and remain optimistic. Respecting others, expressing gratitude and listening more than talking—all these things enable me to understand people better, enriching my thoughts and giving me happiness."

MAGAZINE KING

R.S. SODHI, 62

Managing Director, Amul

"We all feel happy when people around us are happy and smiling. And I am lucky that every now and then I get a chance to visit village milk societies. There I see people, young and old, pouring milk and savouring the fruits of their hard-earned labour. The joy of seeing their smiles gives me a deep sense of contentment; the satisfaction of choosing to work for the less privileged people for four decades. Our job throws several challenges at us that seem unachievable at times, but I truly feel happy in overcoming such hurdles with meticulous planning and perseverance. Whether it's a routine meal or a long vacation, the moments I spend with my family also make me extremely happy and I'll cherish them forever."



BANDEEP SINGH

SACHIN PILOT, 45

Former deputy chief minister, Rajasthan

"I am one of those who believe that happiness comes more from within than from outside. We have to think of each day, each moment as an opportunity for us to seek out joy and happiness. I also believe that it's the smaller things in life that give us contentment and satisfaction. I am happiest spending time with my two sons, Aaran, 15, and Vehaan, 13. It could be going to the mall or to the theatre to watch a film together and binging on popcorn and junk food. Recently, we went go-karting. These moments are precious. Because of the nature of my job, I don't get to spend as much time with my family as I would have liked to. Ultimately, it's your family and friends who matter and help you through the highs and lows of life."

INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

VOX POP

BANDEEP SINGH

SANJEEV SANYAL, 52

Author and Member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council

"We all seek happiness, but there is no universal way to define it. There are things that bring happiness in the moment. The moment itself may be ephemeral, but the happiness may be deeply meaningful—the joy of a Sunday lunch with family, of walking alone in the mountains, of reading a good book, of meeting an old friend. There is also the happiness of completing a difficult project, or of achieving some goal, or of watching one's children grow up. Then there is the more abstract satisfaction of standing up for a cherished idea."

MAGAZINEPIA

VIVEK R NAIR

HIMA DAS, 22

Athlete

"For me, happiness means running. Not just for a medal or glory, but to express myself. I run to test myself, to challenge myself, to explore the limits of human excellence. For me, happiness is also being in the lap of nature. As someone from the northeast, it's in my DNA. Even when I travel to other cities and countries, I love exploring the greens nearby. But nothing makes me happier than being surrounded by family and friends. And in such a state of mind, I love to cook, occasionally."

NIKHAT ZAREEN, 26

Boxer

GETTY IMAGES

"Doing what I love and achieving success after a lot of struggle and hard work makes me happy. Becoming the World Champion was the happiest and most emotional moment of my life. All my sacrifices felt worth it. It changed my life. I was really proud of myself... and it fulfilled my dream of meeting my favourite actor, Salman Khan."

Contributed by *Kaushik Deka, M.G. Arun, Amarnath K. Menon, Suhani Singh, Jumana Shah, Anilesh S. Mahajan, Rohit Parihar, Romita Datta, Ajay Sukumaran, Amitabh Srivastava, Prashant Srivastava, Shelly Anand, Dhaval Kulkarni, Pushyamitra, Himanshu Shekhar, Pradeepika Saraswat, Chumki Bharadwaj and Ridhi Kale*

A DELIGHTED READERSHIP
Only a storybook can cover the smiles of the readers at the Buguri Community Library, Bengaluru

IN PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Most of us are driven by visions of personal happiness, but there are rare individuals who work tirelessly for the joy of helping the marginalised whether specially-abled, orphaned, malnourished or just down on their luck. We celebrate people and organisations that bring smiles to the faces of so many

JITHENDRA M

BUGURI COMMUNITY LIBRARY
FOUNDED: 2016
Bengaluru

A Reading Nook of Their Own

***Happiness delivery:** The Buguri Community Library opens a window to a better world for the children of waste workers*

By **AJAY SUKUMARAN**

On a residential lane sheltered from the bustle of the Banashankari market in south Bengaluru, three young boys wait around a storefront in the late afternoon. Next door, in a tiny house with a tin roof, is the Buguri Community Library, their after-school oasis. Around 4 pm, librarian Pushpalatha S. rides up on her scooter with her toddler in tow and unlocks the grill door—bristling with energy, the boys follow her in. Soon, more readers walk in.

Buguri means a 'spinning top' in Kannada and the library was started in 2016 by the non-profit Hasiru Dala, which engages with waste workers, as a way to connect with children from these communities. "We focus on socio-emotional learning by inculcating a habit of reading and telling them stories," says Sathwik N.N., director of the Buguri Children's Programme at Hasiru Dala.

The two-room library, decorated with paintings and other artwork made by the children, has three shelves of books. A reading session with a group of volunteers engages the children, who break out into loud cheers. It is followed by singing and then a rehearsal of a play they are staging. "I love this place more than my school," says Ramai, a student of Class 9. Her companion Jessie adds that they have been participating in the art, reading and knitting classes for four years now. "Whatever we learn here, we teach our friends back in school," she says.

Hasiru Dala works as a liaison between municipal bodies and waste-pickers to ensure that social security measures like identity cards, minimum wages, health schemes and housing reach them. "In the programme, we work with waste workers' children, making sure that they go to school. The most important thing is to make sure that the children do not get into waste-picking," says Sathwik. There are scholarships and summer camps for the children too. The programme works with youngsters from the primary school level all the way up to Class 12. As the evening's activities draw to a close, there are beaming smiles and excited chatter all around—a happy ending to another day. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"It makes me happy to see children excited by new ideas...jumping in, as if they were born to be joyful"

— SATHWIK N.N., Director, Buguri Children's Programme

MAGAZINE KING

OVER THE MOON India's first space lab in a government primary school in Hasudi Ausanpur village, UP

In a Higher Space

***Happiness delivery:** Hasudi Ausanpur in Uttar Pradesh's impoverished Siddharthnagar district ticks all the boxes of a smart village, bagging seven national awards*

By **ASHISH MISRA**

Aastha, a Class 3 student at the Government Upper Primary School in Hasudi Ausanpur village in the Siddharthnagar district of Uttar Pradesh, had heard from her grandparents that an old lady on the moon runs a mill there. Then, she saw the moon through the telescope of the space lab set up in her school. Excited, Aastha now tells her friends that there are only potholes on the earth's natural satellite. She can also tell them about aeroplanes, drones and the solar system besides all the satellites to be launched in the country by the year 2030 and what they will do. Not just Aastha, but students from more than 100 other government schools have found out whether all the stories they have heard about outer space are actually true, all thanks to the unique lab designed and set up by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 2022.

Why Hasudi Ausanpur, you may ask. The remote village is part of Siddharthnagar, which found itself in

MANEESH AGNIHOTRI

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Seeing the development of Hasudi Ausanpur, other pradhans have been inspired to convert their villages into smart ones"

— JAYENDRA KUMAR, Chief Development Officer, Siddharthnagar

the NITI Aayog's list of 112 most underdeveloped districts in the country in 2018. But the village has fast distanced itself from that disrepute, winning seven national and two state awards in the past few years under the dynamic leadership of its 44-year-old pradhan, Dilip Kumar Tripathi, who has made it his mission to make the village 'smart'.

The entire village, which falls under the Bhanwapur block and has a population of 1,024 and an area of 1,300 hectares, is equipped with wi-fi. The hi-tech panchayat building has a video-conferencing facility. CCTV cameras have been installed at 23 places besides public address systems at the same number of places. The streets are illuminated with 90 LED lamps powered by 45 solar panels.

There are underground drains and the walls of the buildings adjacent to the roads have been painted with educative messages. An RO water plant provides pure drinking water to the villagers. In honour of the women, the outer walls of the houses have been painted pink, declaring it a Pink Village. There is a system of door-to-door garbage collection besides an agricultural machinery bank. To tackle the problem of air pollution caused by brick kilns in the village, an outdoor mass-level air purifier has been installed that can purify 9 lakh cubic metres of air per day. All initiatives have been funded from the Panchayat Nidhi.

The Upper Primary School is the only such institution with state-of-the-art facilities in all of UP. All classrooms are air-conditioned. The digital lab is wi-fi-enabled and teachers have biometric attendance. Devendra Pandey, Siddharthnagar's Basic Education Officer, says, "Now, students from remote government schools have a strong desire to become scientists instead of doctors, engineers and officers."

The idea of the space lab germinated in September 2019 when Tripathi, a postgraduate in Ancient History, was watching Hindi film *Mission Mangal* in a Lucknow theatre with his family. Later, he approached Vyomika Space Pvt. Ltd, which was working in the field of space education in North India in association with ISRO. CEO Govind Yadav recalls, "Our team was surprised to discover the awareness about space among the students of a government school in a backward district." The lab was launched on November 14 (Children's Day), 2022.

Two halls and a big verandah of the school have been converted into the lab. Headmaster Manoj Kumar Varun says, "Scale models (1:20) of all the satellites launched by ISRO since 1980 and those that will be launched till 2030 are on display here. These include models of rockets and launchers such as the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), the Geostationary Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), GSLV MK-III, Gaganyaan, RLV-TD." Light to heavy drones are also on display and students are being trained to fly them. Teacher Ram Kripal Paswan explains, "Students are also learning how drones can be used in agricultural work like spraying fertilisers and monitoring fields. After they turn 18, they can make a career in drone technology with a drone pilot licence from the Centre. This will help stop the migration from villages to cities."

The space lab also has two telescopes of 60 mm and 130 mm besides 12 different models of remote-operated aircraft. Children can fly them from a distance of 2 km. Aided by a 3D printer, they are also being trained to design and print models of aircraft and other spacecraft. It's the only school in UP that has been selected for the ISRO campus tour.

These and other distinctions have made Hasudi Ausanpur a centre of attraction. So much so that IAS probationers and researchers now drop in to study its success. ■

MAGAZINE KING

Breakfast Mama

***Happiness delivery:** A primary school teacher at a tribal school in Kerala takes steps to make sure her wards are not sitting in class hungry*

By **JEEMON JACOB**

ASHISH K VINCENT

LINCY GEORGE, 42 TEACHER
Idukki, Kerala

Some three months ago, two Class IV students at the Government Tribal School in Murikattukudy in Kerala's hill district Idukki fainted during morning class. An inquiry revealed that the children had come to school hungry, without having breakfast. Shockingly, when the school did a headcount, some 120 students reluctantly admitted that they too were sitting in class hungry.

Lincy George, a partially blind primary school teacher, had taken the lead in the inquiry. She was horrified when 12 of her wards admitted that they had been coming to school on an empty stomach every day. The parents of many of the students worked at the nearby plantations, and left home early for work. "I shared my concerns with the other teachers and headmaster," says Lincy, "and we conducted a survey. It revealed that 120 of the 407 students were in the same situation. It pained me as a mother and as a teacher."

She discussed the issue with her husband Sebastian George, part of the clerical staff at a local school, and they decided to make arrangements for breakfast for the hungry students. Lincy raised funds from her own personal savings, colleagues and PTA officials and started her breakfast project some two months back. Many other people have also come forward now to sponsor the effort. Government and state-aided schools in Kerala already have a mid-day meal scheme in place for poor children, but "no school till now was providing breakfast for students", says Lincy. The programme has seen tremendous success; the students are more cheerful now and also actively participate in classroom activities. Lincy's efforts haven't stopped there. She has also helped build six houses for her wards who were living in sheds. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"I get so much happiness in the company of my students, so it's my duty to make their life a little better. Every little bit counts...I feel like I have a big family to feed"

— LINCY GEORGE, Teacher

MAGAZINE KING

INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

ART AND SOUL

***Happiness delivery:** Reviving traditional handicrafts such as the Kani shawl by introducing new designs and patterns, inspiring the younger generation to learn the craft of their forefathers and using art to dispel stereotypes about Kashmir*

By **MOAZUM MOHAMMAD**

CHINAR DAYS
Deepa Soni at 'The Autumn Art Exhibit' in Srinagar, Nov. 26, 2022

ABID BHAT

DEEPA SONI, 38
ARTIST AND FASHION DESIGNER
Srinagar

Her ties with Kashmir began long before she moved there. Originally from Patiala in Punjab but settled in the garrison town of Udhampur in Jammu, Deepa Soni's family would for decades buy Pashmina shawls and papier mache articles from an itinerant merchant whom they knew as Farooq Baba of Tangmarg. The tradition had run in his family for several generations, and his greatest fear was that it would die with their generation. The youngsters had neither the interest nor the patience to carry forward the legacy.

An artist at heart, Soni would always be moved by Baba's story, and wanted to do something for artisans like him. Her opportunity came when her government servant husband was posted to Srinagar in 2021. Soni began conducting free workshops for skilled and amateur craftspersons, especially young women from the rural hinterland. "From eight to 80," says Soni, "my workshops began attracting people across age groups."

Soon top artisans began lauding her efforts. "I met with the older generation of artists and have worked with them to create new designs and colours so that the crafts met contemporary standards without losing their originality," adds Soni, who is spending her second season of the *chillai kalan*—the harshest period of the Kashmiri winter—in the Valley. "My work is to encourage and inspire the younger lot to return to the *karkhanas* (workshops). Kashmiri handicrafts need no introduction across the world. My techniques, designs and patterns in embroidery enhance their market value."

Soni is also helping keep tradition alive, particularly of the oldest craft in the Valley—the GI-tagged Kani shawl, which has a provenance dating back to Mughal times. Made of the finest Pashmina sourced from the Changthang goats found in the high reaches of Ladakh, the shawls derive their name from the place of their origin—Kani-

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"I am driven to spread happiness. Art and creativity are in the blood of Kashmiris. What they lack is exposure. I am acting as that bridge"

DEEPA SONI, Artist and fashion designer

hama—woven with the help of eyeless needles called *kani* or *tuzhi*. Woven on handlooms, Kani shawl-making is a long, laborious process that not only requires immense skill but also infinite patience, with a single stole taking six months to a year or two to make. The design script itself is an intricate code, a 'taleem' drawn on paper that is decipherable only by the weaver. Over the years, however, the lack of a skilled workforce, exploitative middlemen and competition from cheaper, machine-made products have left the craftsmen disheartened.

Soni's workshops, therefore, are serving as the last hope for the 'last generation of craftspersons'. "The last generation is not passing their craft or skills to their offspring," she says. "They want them to be doctors, engineers—anything but craftspersons." The oldest family of Kani shawl weavers—the Sant Kabir Award-winning Mirs of Natipora in Srinagar—is all praise for Soni. Majid Ahmad Mir, a fifth-generation artisan who has a master's in economics and political science from Kashmir University and IGNOU, had long lamented the prospect of the craft of his forefathers disappearing into the pages of history. Soni's interventions, he says, have given it a new lease of life. He recalls

DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

ONE-MAN ARMY Sushanta Giri, on a boat in one of the many creeks that cut through the Sundarbans

Helping Hand on the Sundarbans

***Happiness delivery:** Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha helps people in the Sundarbans' remote coastal villages battle grim lives by taking care of their basic needs*

By **ROMITA DATTA**

the time when they were all wondering what to do with a discarded piece of Kani shawl. "She asked us to get five metres of crepe fabric and integrated the discarded piece into it to make a beautiful sari," says Mir.

Likewise, her interventions in *pherans*—the long traditional gown Kashmiris wear in winter—have produced stunning results. She introduced the paisley motif at the back of the garment, and got craftsmen to weave traditional colours in unusual combinations so that the final products became statement pieces. "Not only has the volume of our business increased but our craft is breathing again," says Mir, who was part of the six-member team from India that was invited to Oxford University in 2019 to share their experiences in different fields.

Ask her what drives her passion, and Soni says it's the feeling that she can perhaps play a part in bringing happiness into people's lives. "I am driven to spread happiness," she adds. "Art and creativity are in the blood of Kashmiris. What they lack is exposure. I am acting as that bridge."

The same impulse permeates Soni's paintings as well. A self-taught painter since childhood, she has done a series as a tribute to the 'last generation of artisans in Kashmir'. At 'The Autumn Art Exhibit' in Srinagar in November 2022, not only was her own art on display, but all were encouraged to participate. One painting in particular inspired much discussion. It showed a child in a cap on a papier mache-patterned prayer rug and rosary. "I used the papier mache background as a tribute to the artisans who are keeping the art alive against all odds," says Soni. "My work evoked a lot of curiosity among younger people. I am getting a lot of inquiries."

Alongside, Soni is trying to dispel the misconceptions and stereotypes around Kashmir through her works and promote 'peace' and 'positivity'. "There is a certain fear outside Kashmir that the place is not safe," she says. "But every bit of this place is inspiring. And that is the message I want to portray though my paintings." It's art with a heart. ■

BAIKUNTHAPUR TARUN SANGHA
FOUNDED: 1983
The Sundarbans, West Bengal

Bit by bit, Sushanta Giri's mother wasted away, as the deadly liver ailment progressed. The family, who live in the remote Baikunthapur village in the Sundarbans in West Bengal, had no means to take her to the nearest subdivisional hospital at Joynagar, 49 km away, for treatment. Giri's eyes well up as he recalls those nights when his mother suffered acute pain, and how he frantically did the rounds of village quacks for some palliative. Giri's mother passed away the day he wrote the final paper of his school-leaving board exam. Back from the funeral, the 18-year-old resolved to help improve the living condition of the people who live in these coastal backwaters—the very margins both geographically and socio-economically—so that they could access the basic needs of life.

For thousands of underprivileged villagers in the Sundarbans, life is not just about coping with poverty and the absence of healthcare, education and roads and communication, it is also fraught by a constant struggle with nature—cyclones, flash floods, farmland laid waste by saline water from the sea, and land erosion.

Giri embarked on a comprehensive plan of community development and self-sufficiency, so that villagers could send their children to schools and share in the possibilities of a rapidly digitising world.

The beginning, in 1983, was humble: a primary school run by the local Ekta Youth Club. Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha (BTS) began as a school for the underprivileged forced to discontinue their education due to acute poverty. "We had 25 students to begin with. Our main aim was to give basic education to local children and tie up with good schools for higher education. Education was highly subsidised—a tuition fee of Rs 5-7, and a free meal with milk," says Giri. Today, Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha is a reputed English-medium school till Class 8 with around 100 students. Earlier, teachers gave voluntary services; Giri is now able to pay them a monthly honorarium of Rs 2,000 because of aid and donors. BTS also has 500 former students—professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers and nurses—who are doing their bit for their alma mater. "The primary school was a stepping stone for getting the FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) registration in 1996," he says. But Giri has not stopped there. BTS's activities in healthcare, community development and employment generation cover 52 villages of 14 gram panchayats in seven blocks of the Sundarbans. The total number of beneficiaries is estimated to be 55,000.

Though the region is a Unesco-declared world heritage

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"When I see a young boy who could not afford to go to school become a doctor, lawyer, teacher or working in an MNC, I tear up in utter joy."

SUSHANTA GIRI, Founder, BTS

MAGAZINE KING

site, 85 per cent of the Sundarbans' population falls in the BPL category. The rise in the maternal mortality ratio by at least 10 per cent in the coastal areas between 2005 and 2010 led Giri to start a community delivery centre in collaboration with the state's health and family welfare department under the NRHM. Over the years, it has served 922 rural women in the safe institutional delivery of newborns. It runs a 10-bed maternity clinic and holds medical camps periodically. To villagers with only around an acre of farm land, BTS has imparted professional aid so that their patches are transformed into highly productive areas yielding vegetables and lentils. "Villagers are growing paddy on slightly raised banks of their ponds, breeding fish. They get iron, vitamins and minerals from their own kitchen garden," adds Giri. BTS has also helped villagers sell their excess organic produce. The integrated farming approach has now increased farm earning three times from the meagre Rs 2,500 a month.

"I now earn Rs 40,000 a month from farm produce and Rs 12,000 a year from fish farming," says 36-year-old Soumen Samanta of Moipith-Nagenabad. "Even without ponds, BTS has taught us how to grow fish by digging drains around the field. Organic farming has taken off because of BTS—giving us seeds, other inputs and training free of cost." Rashmoni Kayal of Baikunthapur says, "Now men don't feel the need of leaving the villages. There's so much to do that no one sits idle." Rashmoni and other village women now complement their family income by doing tailoring and zaree work at a nearby Usha Silai School that is run with the BTS. Another BTS team, in collaboration with the Sneh Foundation, supplies low-cost sanitary napkins to students and housewives.

Besides all this, BTS has its own disaster mitigation task force for quick and on-the-spot response to natural calamities that are the bane of the Sundarbans, helping administration in prompt evacuation, rescue and distribution of relief. During the Amphan and Yaas cyclones, they saved many lives. Susanta Giri is a happy man today. His life's work has changed thousands of lives. ■

Nurturing the Next Generation

***Happiness delivery:** Born out of the tragic infant deaths in Kota in 2019, Suposhit Maa Abhiyan provides specially curated nutrition kits and regular medical check-ups to underweight expectant mothers and ensures their children get a healthy start in life*

By **ROHIT PARIHAR**

MAGAZINE KING

As Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla walks through the narrow alleys of a slum in Kota, his parliamentary constituency, to enquire about the health of young mothers and their newborns, his stern facial expression—usually on display while he is chairing the House proceedings—gives way to a benevolent smile. Always up for promoting a public cause, from mobile kitchens to free clothes for the poor, Birla found a new mission when Kota's JK Lone Hospital reported a high incidence of infant deaths in December 2019. "Often, a newborn is weak because of the mother's poor health, which in turn is due to the lack of adequate medical advice during pregnancy," says Birla, whose wife Amita, a gynaecologist, helped him understand that maternal and infant mortality in India are not always related to poor health infrastructure or doctors' negligence.

SUPOSHIT MAA ABHIYAN
FOUNDED: 2020
Kota, Rajasthan

Thus was born the Suposhit Maa Abhiyan (or a well-nourished mother campaign) to identify undernourished women, mostly expectant mothers, and provide them with nutrition kits along with regular medical check-ups for a few months after the delivery. Union minister Smriti Irani launched its first phase on February 29, 2020, after Birla involved social workers and doctors to identify the beneficiaries, who were mostly labourers and domestic helps residing in slums. Seeing the positive results among the 1,000 women covered under the scheme, Birla in May 2022 extended the campaign to cover 3,000 women in the second phase. "We often talk of hunger, but malnutrition is a bigger issue affecting our new generation. Our campaign not only helps improve the health of a woman but also her newborn, besides creating awareness about a healthy diet among the whole family," says Birla, while recalling how the Covid-induced lockdown soon after the launch of the first phase reinforced his belief that improving nutrition can go a long way towards building a healthy generation.

The Janani Social Work and Health Sanstha Team is his leading partner in this effort. To identify the beneficiaries, it held camps at 26 places, involving health officials and anganwadi workers. Underweight women can easily be identified through physical examination. Nutritionists then work out the curated list of food supplements, including molasses, porridge, ghee and a multigrain diet. A monthly kit weighs about 15 kg and costs about Rs 1,000. In cases of severe anaemia, extra supplements are given. The kits are delivered for up to a year, often beginning in the third month of pregnancy. Some private doctors have joined the effort by offering free consultations at their clinics.

"What I found encouraging is that almost all deliveries have turned out to be normal, with two-thirds of the babies weighing above normal," says Birla, who wants to bring down his constituency's maternal and infant mortality rates to the lowest across India. "But I also want this pilot project to be rigorously evaluated and then implemented all over the country. As the Speaker, I urge other elected representatives to take up similar programmes in their constituencies as well." It's definitely an effort worth emulating. ■

FEEDING CHANGE
Speaker Om Birla meets beneficiaries of the Suposhit Maa Abhiyan

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Knowing that my efforts are keeping mothers and children healthy makes me extremely happy"

OM BIRLA, Lok Sabha Speaker and founder, Suposhit Maa Abhiyan

MAGAZINE KING

HAPPINESS HEROES

Battling the Black Scourge

***Happiness delivery:** A victim of Kala Azar in her pre-teens, Pinki has taken it upon herself to create awareness about the dreaded disease in her home district, Deoria, in UP*

By **PRASHANT SRIVASTAVA**

MAGAZINE KING

BE WARY Pinki (centre) with students at one of her *pathshala* classes

PINKI KI PATHSHALA
RUNNING SINCE: JULY 2022
Deoria, UP

It's a cold morning at the government school in Deoria district's Banghata block, and a group of 30 students are listening to a girl not much older than themselves. She is 19-year-old Pinki Chauhan, who runs Pinki ki Pathshala, as part of an awareness programme on 'Kala Azar' or 'black fever', a vector-borne disease caused by the protozoan parasite, *Leishmania donovani*, which can be fatal if not treated. A victim of Kala Azar herself, Pinki has now become a household name across Uttar Pradesh's Deoria district for the informal classes she takes in government schools to raise awareness about the disease in the region. She not only gives details about the disease, but also engages students through a series of games so that she can effectively drive home her mission and message—'*Hansna bhi, jagrook karna bhi* (Smile but also be on your guard)'.

Pinki "caught the black fever" in 2015 when she was just 12. She recovered, but a year later again fell victim to kala azar's sequential infection—post-kala azar dermal leishmaniasis (PKDL)—in which the parasite invades the skin. It took years to recover fully, a difficult time when she took the decision to do what she could to create awareness about the disease. The chance came in November 2021 when she got involved with the UP government's community engagement efforts to create awareness against lymphatic filariasis (a painful, disfiguring disease otherwise known as elephantiasis) and dermal leishmaniasis. Since then, she and her pathshala have visited several villages of Deoria.

Says Pinki, "I am a victim myself so I know the pain and the struggles. I realised that few people know what causes kala azar (the disease is spread by sandflies). Nor do they realise how serious it can be. Apart from taking classes at schools, I now cycle around the district in a bid to reach out to at least two dozen people every day. I talk about the disease, its warning signs and symptoms and prevention, besides telling people who to contact if they have doubts." She feels people know about mosquitoes, but not so much about sandflies, which are 50-

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Staying fit and healthy is essential to be happy. And to stay fit, one must be aware about lurking maladies. Awareness is key for a healthy future"

PINKI CHAUHAN, Kala Azar awareness campaigner

MAGAZINE KING

60 times smaller in size. "Staying alert about its breeding places, such as small holes, damp walls and areas like *gaushalas* (cow shelters) is the only way to save ourselves," she says.

"I have seen people run from pillar to post for treatment. And that leads to a lot of suffering and wastage of money. The treatment itself is simple if we get in touch with the district health officials and doctors. You don't need to go to private hospitals either because government hospitals are equipped to cure it," Pinki adds. She is hoping to become a social worker in the future, adding that half of Purvanchal's problems would be solved if the health and education infrastructure saw improvement.

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, people of UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal are at risk in India, where cases have been recorded in 54 districts of these states where the disease is endemic. Deoria, Kushinagar, Ballia and Ghazipur districts are the hotspots in UP. India has pledged to eliminate the disease by the end of 2023 although the WHO is hoping to achieve the same result globally only by the end of 2030.

Pinki says she began her campaign against the disease from her own college, the Babban Singh Intermediate College in Ratasiya village of Deoria district. Having got positive feedback, in July, she started visiting schools and local communities. Till date, she has been able to reach out to over 10,000 children across several schools in Deoria. Pinki is now planning visits to schools in other nearby districts. The National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), the central nodal agency for prevention and control of vector-borne diseases, has also officially praised her contribution in spreading awareness against the dreaded Kala Azar. ■

A Shade Better

***Happiness delivery:** Forest First has not only helped restore native plant species in the Western Ghats but has also improved the lives of local communities*

By **SONALI ACHARJEE**

After 16 years of working at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in Wayanad, Kerala, it was a 2010 visit to a piece of land Meera Chandran's family owned in the district that changed her life. She found that Lantana weed, an invasive species that kills native plants, had taken over the land, thereby upsetting the ecological balance. For three years, Chandran worked tirelessly—manually uprooting the weeds so that they don't grow back—to clear the area and restore native plant species. Around the same time, the endeavour made Chandran want to work on conservation on a larger scale, and thus, the Forest First Samithi was born. After four years of juggling TCS and Forest First, she finally quit her job and devoted her entire time to conservation.

"Forest First was started with a vision to conserve a large diversity of native tree species, including rare, endangered and threatened flora, by restoring lands that are degraded by exotic invasive species," says Chandran.

Since its

FOREST FIRST SAMITHI
FOUNDED: 2010
Wayanad, Kerala

GREEN SHOOTS
Meera Chandran (extreme left) with members of the Forest First Samithi

MAGAZINE KING

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Happiness is when the saplings we plant become big trees, attracting a larger biodiversity of birds and several pollinators, triggering a cycle of restoration"

MEERA CHANDRAN, Founder, Forest First

inception, Forest First has restored over 300 acres of land in Wayanad and in Kodagu in Karnataka, and with years of fieldwork, the organisation has given a new lease of life to around 150 tree species in the Western Ghats.

Allowing native species to thrive does more than restore forests—it helps local wildlife and forest communities as well. The Lantana species, for example, kills plants on which herbivores thrive. Consequently, as the animals gradually leave the forest, predators often follow suit, which leads to man-animal conflict. A 2020 study conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, says Lantana occupies 154,000 sq. km of forests (44 per cent by area) in India's tiger range. Restoring natural flora would bring wildlife back to the area and provide a safe home for endangered species. Additionally, edible fruits and seeds produced by the trees also help enhance the livelihoods of local communities. "After we remove invasive species, nature rebounds in just a few weeks of rain," says Chandran.

The Forest First Samithi also works actively with local tribes who have traditional knowledge of flora and fauna. The NGO hires 20 tribal people for 10 months a year. Support comes from corporates as well as crowdfunding platforms, and the money is passed on to communities who help the NGO with uprooting weeds and monitoring plants. "We have trained 45 people in restoration, thus supporting livelihoods in the villages around forests. We want to involve more indigenous people who can support our work," says Meera. She adds that she feels deeply happy when eco-restoration helps improve people's livelihoods.

In 2017, Forest First started working on restoration of sacred groves that are overrun by harmful weeds, and so far, it has saved nearly 20 acres of area. The group has also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Kerala Forest Department to restore 200 acres of degraded forest land in critical animal habitat areas of Wayanad. Upon the completion of the project, these areas will not only become safe spaces for flora, fauna, wildlife and local communities but also beautiful sites for visitors to enjoy and experience native biodiversity. ■

GOLDEN HOURS
A woman in Modhera village cleaning a solar panel on her rooftop

NANDAN DAVE

MAGAZINE KING

Sunshine Village

SURYAGRAM PROJECT
FOUNDED: 2019-20
Gujarat

***Happiness delivery:** Modhera in Gujarat has become a net-renewable energy generator, setting an extraordinary example for sustainable living*

By **JUMANA SHAH**

Ajaysinh Solanki, a 21-year-old mechanical engineer, is hoping to welcome the summer this year with an air conditioner, a 'luxury' that until now hardly anyone in his village could afford. On the terrace of his modest one-storey house—Solanki's is a joint family of 20—in Modhera village in Gujarat's Mehsana district are items that are common for a typical rural household in India: pickles and spices laid out under the sun, a clothesline, an occasional straw mat. Among these, however, are also four shiny solar panels of 1 KW each that the members of the house take turns to clean. Nobody is complaining, though. Installed just about a year ago—with no hefty down-payment—these solar panels are the reason behind an extra Rs 500 Solanki is now able to save every month because of the significant reduction in his monthly electricity bill. He hopes that the money will help with his sisters' education. Others in Modhera have similar stories to share. For some households, in fact, electricity is now entirely free of cost.

There are roughly 1,700 houses in Modhera, and 1,350 of them now have rooftop photovoltaic (RTPV) systems. A year ago, the Gujarat government completed installing RTPV systems in the village under the Suryagram Project. The programme, carried out at a cost of Rs 80.66 crore, has been split between the Centre and the state government. Each house is linked to the central electricity grid, and power expenses for most households have reduced by 40 to 100 per cent.

For about six months now, the village has not imported any power from the grid and has instead been supplying green power. It has become the first village in India to become a net renewable energy generator. According to an official from the Gujarat Power Corporation Ltd, the government agency anchoring the project, about 6,332 kWh of power is generated daily. Modhera consumes about 6,000 kWh per day, and the rest is given to the grid. Solar panels are also installed over government buildings, and the popular Sun Temple is now literally powered by solar energy. It also hosts an electric charging facility for motor vehicles, a free service often utilised by tourists. Daytime power is supplied through solar panels, and after sunset, electricity is supplied via the Battery Energy Storage System, the plant for which is situated in Sujjanpura village, about 6 km from Modhera.

Many in Modhera can now dream of a slightly better quality of life. Most people in the village are small farmers, agricultural labourers or livestock herders. "The average income of each household ranges from Rs 8,000 to Rs 10,000. About 500 households are educated, and many youth are employed in automobile factories nearby. Their incomes are around Rs 15,000-Rs 25,000," says Jatanben Thakor, the village sarpanch. Even a few hundred extra rupees saved at the end of each month is a substantial amount for the families. Amratlal Prajapati, for example, a retired clerk from the tourism department, is planning to give a complete makeover to his house, while his wife Savita is hoping to include more vegetables and fruits in the family's diet. Prajapati hasn't received an electricity bill in four months now because of the solar panel on his rickety rooftop.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Whenever there is a mention of solar power in the world, Modhera will stand out"

— PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

(at Modhera in October 2022)

These achievements haven't gone unnoticed. In October 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Modhera and declared it India's first village that meets its complete energy needs with solar power. Soon after, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited the place and lauded the efforts: "What is amazing, and we must thank in a very emotional way the people of this village, and also the government of Gujarat and the government of India, is that here there is a reconciliation between humankind and the planet."

The transformation of Modhera has made the village shine on the global map as a symbol of possibilities, showing the way for not just India's but the world's efforts towards sustainable living. ■

MAGAZINE KING

Well Worth It

Happiness delivery: The Million Wells campaign is striving to rejuvenate Bengaluru's groundwater table while providing a livelihood to the Mannu Vaddar well-digging community

MILLION WELLS FOR BENGALURU
FOUNDED: 2015
Bengaluru, Karnataka

By **AJAY SUKUMARAN**

Fourteen years ago, S. Vishwanath was getting on his motorcycle somewhere in south Bengaluru when a man tapped him on the shoulder, asking if he wanted a well. That's right, a water well. A rainwater harvesting enthusiast, Vishwanath was nonetheless flabbergasted by the random question. In the conversation that ensued, he started to learn of the numerous open wells in Bengaluru up until the mid-1980s when borewells began to take over. And how the Mannu Vaddar community that made a living from digging these open wells was gradually finding itself out of work. The idea of a campaign to dig a million wells for Bengaluru was thus born.

"If we have a million wells, Bengaluru will never run short of water," says Vishwanath, an urban planner who was on a committee to frame bylaws for rainwater harvesting in the burgeoning city. It's a straightforward argument. If the city's annual rainfall is averaged out over 365 days, Bengaluru

A LOCALITY'S LIFELINE
S. Vishwanath sitting next to a half-century-old well at Sonnapannahalli in Bengaluru

JITHENDRA M

MAGAZINE KING

would get the equivalent of 3,000 million litres per day. That's twice the volume of water being pumped into the city from the Cauvery (1,450 MLD) across a distance of 120 km. Currently, however, the peripheral parts of the city are still awaiting the supply of piped Cauvery water, and thus remain dependent on borewells for sustenance. It has led to a paradoxical situation—the overexploitation of groundwater means that even the borewells are running dry, while the rainwater is running off the city's concrete surfaces without percolating down to the aquifers, leading to flooding of localities during a downpour. "If we can tap half of the rainwater and push it into the ground, that's the equivalent of another Cauvery flowing right below us," says Vishwanath. That's where the recharge wells—which push the rainwater from the rooftops and roads into the ground—and the Mannu Vaddars who dig them come into play.

By promoting well-digging through the Million Wells campaign, Vishwanath and his team bring citizens in contact with the community. There are about 750 well-diggers in Bengaluru for whom this is the main source of livelihood.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Open wells are rural India's swimming pools. It gives me great joy to see children swim in their cool waters during summer holidays when mercury soars to 45 degrees Celsius outside"

S. VISHWANATH, Founder, Million Wells campaign

They also happen to be a repository of information about wells in the city. Shankarappa, 44, from the Bengaluru suburb of Sarjapura, recalls how, as a toddler, he would accompany his father as he went from locality to locality, digging new wells or cleaning old ones. "Even 15 years ago, a batch of six men would dig two to three wells a month," says Shankarappa. But work has dwindled in the years since, he says. The Million Wells campaign, therefore, is an attempt to reconnect citizens with an urban necessity and also a cultural history.

"People have their personal, unique stories related to wells," says Vishwanath. "The effort here is to bring wells back into open consciousness, and make sure that they are functional and clean, and that the heritage is protected." Currently, there are an estimated 250,000 wells across the city. "We want to highlight the happy stories around wells to get more and more people to participate," says Shubha Ramachandran, the water team lead at Biome Environmental Trust, which Vishwanath set up in 2009. While Biome has been promoting wells for long, the Million Wells for Bengaluru campaign was formalised in July 2015. The campaign has also served as a model for the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation piloted in 10 cities, Bengaluru being one of them. ■

IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN Students at a signal school in Thane

MANDAR DEODHAR

MAGAZINE KING

A Signal Achievement

***Happiness delivery:** A school that operates under a flyover at a busy junction provides underprivileged street children education, three square meals a day, and also trains them in life skills*

SIGNAL SHALA
FOUNDED: 2016
Thane, Maharashtra

By **DHAVAL KULKARNI**

I am yet to make up my mind, but I want to become a policeman," says Kiran Chandrakant Kale, a Class 10 student, as portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and former president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam stare at him benignly from the walls of his classroom. Kale is not just another student spelling out his career goal. He is among the underprivileged street children being educated at a 'signal shala', a school located under a flyover at the busy Teen Haat Naka in Thane.

The students in this unique school belong to migrant families from de-notified tribes. They once sold flowers and trinkets or even begged at the traffic signal. Out of the educational mainstream, they ran the risk of being sucked into a vortex of substance abuse and crime.

The school, which now operates from a set of five air-conditioned containers, was launched in June 2016 by the NGO Samarth Bharat Vyaspith. Children here get an education, three square meals a day, and also training in life skills. "I used to sell flowers at the signal," says Kale. "Initially, when the teachers approached my parents, they refused to send me to school. They felt that education would not help us in any way. But the teachers eventually prevailed on my parents, and I came here." Kale and his sister stay with their mother and maternal

grandparents on the road near the signal. His father is a marginal farmer in Ahmednagar.

Bhatu Sawant, the CEO of Samartha Bharat Vyaspith, says the idea of the signal school took shape when he worked as a reporter with a Marathi daily in 2016. At a press conference on the Thane Municipal Corporation's (TMC) education budget, he came across a line that said the civic body wanted to mainstream children who were out of the educational system. "So, we decided to conduct a survey of children at signals and understand who their parents were, their means of livelihood and if they were in school," he adds.

The moment of epiphany came when they realised the kids could not be admitted to "mainstream" schools as this meant a loss of income for their parents. "Hence, we thought, why not take the school to them?" says Sawant. Thus came up the 'signal shala' in a container under the flyover at the Teen Haat Naka. The location was strategic—22 roads converge at the junction, making it one of the busiest in the state. The substantial idling time for vehicles means the road has a significant number of pavement dwellers who hawk their wares to motorists.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"I sold flowers, gajras, caps etc... Now, I want to complete my education and learn trades like making toys and mobile phones"

— SHYAM RAMESH PAWAR, Class VI

Getting the children to school was tough, but the volunteers and teachers prevailed on their parents. "Most of the students are from the Pardhi community and speak their own dialect. The teachers had to learn the dialect and teach their wards using this vernacular idiom," says Sawant.

So far, seven students have cleared Class 10. When two students first completed their matriculation in 2018, it inspired more students to enrol. Of these two, one has completed a diploma in electrical engineering and is working with a consumer goods company. The other is completing his bachelor's degree in Arts and is preparing for the police recruitment drive. Other matriculates include a diploma in automobile engineering and a fitter with an engineering major.

Today, the school has 40 students from the playgroup to Class 10. Staffed by seven teachers, it has computer, science and robotics labs. Two students have been selected in an inter-school science competition to visit the Indian Space Research Organisation early next year. Students are also taught trades like plumbing, carpentry and painting from Class 7.

However, Sawant believes they still have a long way to go, especially when it comes to girls who are forced to drop out and married off early by their parents because they find it difficult to ensure their safety on the streets. ■

Mad about Children

***Happiness delivery:** Founded by Jithin Nedumala when he was just 20, Make a Difference has helped hundreds of orphaned children break free of the cycle of poverty*

By **SONALI ACHARJEE**

MAKE A DIFFERENCE (MAD)
FOUNDED: 2006
Kochi, Kerala

In 2010, when Michelle Obama visited India, she was seen playing hopscotch and dancing to *Rang De Basanti* with a few orphaned children in Mumbai. The children were with the Mumbai chapter of Make a Difference (MAD), one of the largest youth-volunteer networks in India for orphaned children. That one meeting with Obama propelled MAD to nationwide popularity.

For Jithin Nedumala, who founded MAD in 2006 when he was just 20 years old, volunteering with children was a coincidence. After losing a close friend at the age of 19, he began volunteering at an orphanage in Kochi to "escape his own pain". There, focusing on someone else's struggles helped him find deeper happiness. "I was able to focus on something larger than myself for the first time," he adds. However, he soon realised that most children he was working with, owing to their circumstances,

ASHISH K VINCENT

A FRESH APPROACH Jithin Nedumala with youth volunteers at the MAD centre in Kochi

MAGAZINE KING

might get sucked into the world of crime and violence. "MAD was born because I was angry at society, where instead of providing children with the best care and support they need to break free of the cycle of poverty, we are just keeping them alive till 18 and then washing our hands of them," says Nedumula.

Today, MAD gives Nedumala the greatest satisfaction. The NGO has worked with around 20,000 volunteers in the past 17 years, building a model that can help children escape inter-generational poverty. "We realised that simply teaching children English would not help—many of them still went on to get arrested for selling drugs, got into toxic relationships, were suicidal or had mental health issues," says Nedumula. So, MAD built a holistic programme wherein along with providing for their basic needs, children also receive exposure to build life skills and essential personality traits.

Today, the first generation of children that Nedumula taught are all adults; most of them are married and earn Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000 a month on average. MAD has also provided them with interest-free funding to build their first home. The cost will be paid back into a kitty that will go towards building homes for the next batch. Nedumala calls it a "cycle of support and happiness".

For many of MAD's volunteers, there is a special joy that comes from a decade-long relationship with a child. "I won't say I have helped thousands of children. I have made a difference to the 10 children I have personally worked with for over a decade now. They are family to me and that relationship continuously makes me happy," says Nedumula. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"To experience deeper happiness, invest long-term in helping others"

— JITHIN NEDUMALA, Founder, MAD

BHUPESH KESHARWANI

MAKING IT POSSIBLE
Vidya Rajput at a beautician training course in Raipur

The Gender Warrior

***Happiness delivery:** A third-gender rights crusader in Chhattisgarh strives to ensure that the members of her community live with dignity*

By **RAHUL NORONHA**

MAGAZINE

VIDYA RAJPUT, 45
TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST
Chhattisgarh

Born Vinay Singh Rajput in 1977 in the Kondagaon district of Chhattisgarh, the third-gender crusader endured decades of abuse as a child and student in her small hamlet of Pharasgaon. "I was not sure of my own identity. I was unable to think like a boy. I felt I was a woman trapped in a man's body," she says. Her effeminate behaviour as a boy made her the target of ridicule. She was often locked up in bathrooms by the boys in her school, was urinated upon and sexually assaulted. Even her own family was bereft of the sensitivity to understand her.

Unable to take it anymore, Vidya fled her village in 1998 to Raipur where she began working as a steward at a hotel. There she met two more stewards who confided in her about their transgender status. They took her to a park in Raipur where members of the community regularly discussed their issues. Vidya heard tales of sexual assault, HIV and rapes. It was then that Vidya decided to start working for their welfare. She quit her job and enrolled with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO). As a volunteer, she focused on HIV patients among transgenders, which gave her greater insights into the issues of the community. Vidya and her friends set up the Chhattisgarh Mitwa Sankalp Samiti, dedicated to mainstreaming the third gender. Encouraged by other members of her network, Vidya underwent a sex-change operation at a hospital in Puducherry in 2015. Vinay became Vidya at this juncture, one that she describes as the greatest watershed event in her life.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"I plan every day of my life in such a way that it becomes a better day than the previous one in terms of my advocacy work. I feel extremely happy on days when I accomplish my goals"

— VIDYA RAJPUT, Transgender activist

In about eight years of advocacy, Vidya has single-handedly been responsible for securing a number of rights for members of her community. One of the major accomplishments was the setting up of the Transgender Welfare Board in 2015. This has helped the members of the gender secure access to subsidised foodgrains and other government services. A shelter home called Garima Grah has been set up in Raipur where they get a place to stay and are also trained in skills like sewing, computers, henna application and coaching for competitive examinations. Vidya's efforts have ensured that the police have an SOP on treating the members of the third gender in custody. Since 2020, the state police has recruited 22 members from the gender—a first in the history of the country. In addition, there is a 2 per cent quota for them in government-built accommodations.

Vidya has succeeded in making the government and the private sector accept her demand to carry out various male-to-female corrective surgeries for free. Transgenders have also been included in the school curriculum in Chhattisgarh.

"The number of third-gender people is grossly underreported because of the stigma attached to it," says Vidya. "I am working on removing that." Only then will she be able to help others of her ilk to unshackle themselves from the harrowing effects of social exclusion. ■

FOR ART'S SAKE Shalini Gupta (right) with participants at a workshop of The Art Sanctuary in Bengaluru

HEMANT MISHRA

MAGAZINE KING

Colours and Camaraderie

THE ART SANCTUARY
FOUNDED: 2019
Bengaluru

***Happiness delivery:** The Art Sanctuary treasures young persons with intellectual disabilities, crafting with care artists, photographers, filmmakers and sculptors out of an abundance of natural talent*

By **AJAY SUKUMARAN**

On the rooftop terrace of a villa near Bengaluru's tech corridor in Marathahalli, an art class is in progress, where a group of young adults are engrossed in a curious endeavour—to draw and colour using their less-preferred hand. There's a great deal of bonhomie, and every once in a while someone breaks into a whoop, while others concentrate on such things as forming a heart shape. The good cheer communicates itself to the mothers accompanying them. The session is being conducted by The Art Sanctuary (TAS), a platform for 'neurodiverse' youngsters to showcase their creative skills. Neurodiverse is a term used to describe individuals with intellectual disability from conditions such as autism, Down's Syndrome, cerebral palsy or dyslexia. "Just because today we don't understand what cognitive impairment is, it cannot be brushed under the carpet," says Bengaluru-based Shalini Gupta, who set up TAS in 2019. A business consultant who gave up her career 21 years ago when her daughter Gayatri was born with Down's Syndrome, Gupta says the idea was

born out of her own experience of bringing up her child. The charitable trust celebrates the artistic talents of specially-abled young adults, and curates and displays their painting, sculpture, films and photographs. The aim of TAS is to pave the way for the inclusion of talented, and variously challenged, youngsters in the mainstream art world.

But showcasing their work meant these youngsters needed training in a conducive environment to upgrade their skills. Thus, TAS began online workshops. Besides, it has a tie-up with the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune for a course in short filmmaking. There's an arrangement with the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) to host painting or clay modelling workshops. "We displayed art made by these young adults for the first time in a commercial gallery four years back and sold 70 per cent of it," says Gupta. TAS has held exhibitions in the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi and the NGMA in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. While TAS works with around 50 youngsters in its workshops, it reaches out to about 1,500 families across India when exhibitions are held via parent support groups in 20 cities.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"The tears in the eyes of a mom as her son is felicitated... as a young filmmaker are those of pure joy"

SHALINI GUPTA, Founder, The Art Sanctuary

At the art session, Sania Khimji wears a tiara she recently won at a beauty pageant to commemorate International Disability Month, along with runner-up Dinal Jain, who is also a swimming champ. Then, there's Sai Shashank Sivaramakrishnan, whose glazed pottery work occupies pride of place alongside the paintings on display. "I feel he's at total peace when he is holding wet clay," says his mother Viji.

"When our children were born, the world told us to expect only tears and therapy.... But look at the amount of joy around us," marvels Gupta. After TAS held its first art exhibition in 2019, there was a marked lift in the mood of some of the young artists, and their dosage of medicines like anti-depressants came down. "They might take four years for a course that you and I would finish in four months. But who is in a rush?" Truly, it's the joy of learning that counts. ■

MAGAZINE KING

INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

A Different High

***Happiness delivery:** Once drug addicts themselves, the couple now runs a drug rehabilitation centre in Guwahati*

By **KAUSHIK DEKA**

SHRISHTI WELLNESS HOME
FOUNDED: 2020
Guwahati

Amrit Baishya was a brilliant student at the Kendriya Vidyalaya he studied in at Noonmati in Guwahati. The only son in a middle-class family, he was highly pampered, every wish of his fulfilled as soon as he uttered it. That his father ran a successful travel agency business and mother worked as a government school teacher also helped. Being among the toppers in every class, he also gave his parents no reason to complain. Nothing seemed off limits, even drinking with senior school students when he was in Class 10. When his parents did intervene, he would flaunt his marksheet at them.

He was in Class 11 in 2010 when Amrit decided it was time to graduate to something bigger. He first experimented with drugs out of the Rs 500 he had taken from his parents to buy a book. Experimentation soon gave way to addiction, and the high scores to a downhill journey away from classrooms and in the dark alleys of Guwahati. Several temporary stints at rehabilitation centres followed, to no avail. Eventually, tired of his constant demand for money, stealing and uncontrollable aggression, Amrit's parents threw him out of their house on June 24, 2017.

It was something that Amrit had not expected. He had taken the support system for granted. With that withdrawn, he either had to take control of his life or hurtle towards unimaginable disaster. Fortunately, he chose to give life another chance and reached out to a friend he had met at a rehab centre. A reformed soul himself, the friend called him to Margherita, a town 500 km east of Guwahati. In the next 10 days, a group of former addicts instilled a sense of purpose in Amrit's mind, and he vowed never to touch drugs again. He returned to Guwahati and started doing errands at var-

NILOTPAL BARUAH

MISSION REHAB
Amrit Baishya with his wife Bornali Baishya at Shrishti in Guwahati

MAGAZINE KING

ious rehab centres to make ends meet. Alongside, he attended motivational meetings, often held among addicts who were trying to recover, at the Don Bosco church. It was in one of those meetings that Amrit met Bornali, a graduate in economics and a former addict herself, and the two fell in love.

Meanwhile, Amrit's parents, impressed with his determination to put his life on track, reached out to him. Amrit, though, chose to spend more time at the rehab centres than at home, and devoted himself to rescuing others who had fallen in the dark abyss that he had once found himself in. He and Bornali tied the knot in January 2020, but they wanted to make their togetherness a meaningful one. The two took a loan of Rs 3 lakh from their parents and, in August 2020, set up Shristi Wellness Home, a rehab centre in the Hengrabari area of Guwahati. In the past two years, the couple, now blessed with a 14-month-old daughter, has helped more than 70 addicts recover from various stages of addiction and return to normal life. Currently, 60 men and 19 women are getting treated at Shristi Wellness Home.

HAPPINESS MANTRA

"Our centre and many others became more relevant as the Assam Police's war on drugs left them unavailable for addicts and many started having severe withdrawal symptoms. With no opportunity to return to drugs, they responded well to treatment"

— AMRIT BAISHYA, Founder, Shrishti Wellness Home

Their collective mission to help the maximum number of drug addicts received a big boost when the Assam Police launched a war against drugs after Himanta Biswa Sarma took charge as chief minister in May 2021. "Our centre and many others became more relevant as suddenly many addicts started having severe withdrawal symptoms because drugs were not available. With no opportunity to return to drugs, they responded well to the treatment," says Amrit.

The Assam police appreciate Amrit and Bornali's efforts, particularly how their spreading of awareness has brought down the demand for drugs and reform of addicts. Indeed, besides running the rehab centres, the duo, along with several other reformed addicts, also conduct regular awareness programmes, particularly in areas known to be hubs of drug peddling. "The story of this couple is inspiring for everyone," says Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, Director General of Assam Police.

"They have helped us create a positive environment. We can arrest drug peddlers, but people like Amrit and Bornali help many vulnerable youngsters stay away from the dangerous path to self-destruction." No one can know it better than them. They have been there. ■

Happy on His Own Terms

YouTuber **Bhuvan Bam** on his OTT leap with *Taaza Khabar* and why having creative control is important to him

Q. Why take *Taaza Khabar* to Disney+ Hotstar and not put it up on your YouTube channel?
I didn't want to make *BB Ki Vines* a hub for every content piece I make. YouTube has given me everything and I'm indebted to them forever. But how do I change the perception that I can only shoot with a muffler or with a moustache on? If I want to explore more with acting, then OTT is an avenue. *Taaza Khabar* is that leap of faith for me. With Hotstar you get a mass-y audience.

Q. YouTube has also changed a lot since you started.
It has to. People are focusing on shorts. What other people used to think of YouTubers [earlier] is how YouTubers feel about short-form content today. I'm not looking down upon any content, but at times I feel that from five-six minutes people have come down to 30 seconds. Where is entertainment headed?

Q. The show is a *BB Ki Vines* production. Why produce everything you make?
I want that creative control. All my life I have been stuck with regrets of seniority, that I can't tell them what I feel. When I feel something is wrong on the set, there has to be some scope for argument. I want to work with others, but as co-producer.

Q. Does Bhuvan Bam want to take the leap to the big screen?
Right now, the wave is, you pick up a popular Instagrammer or YouTuber, give them a side role and promise them that 'this will change your life'. I have been to many narrations at big production houses where the marketing guy is involved, and not the writer or the director, and the first thing they ask is, 'How do you think you will promote this?' So long as I am adding something to the plot and the story, I will do it. I don't want to be an *aloo* [potato] who can be stuffed anywhere.

with Suhani Singh

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